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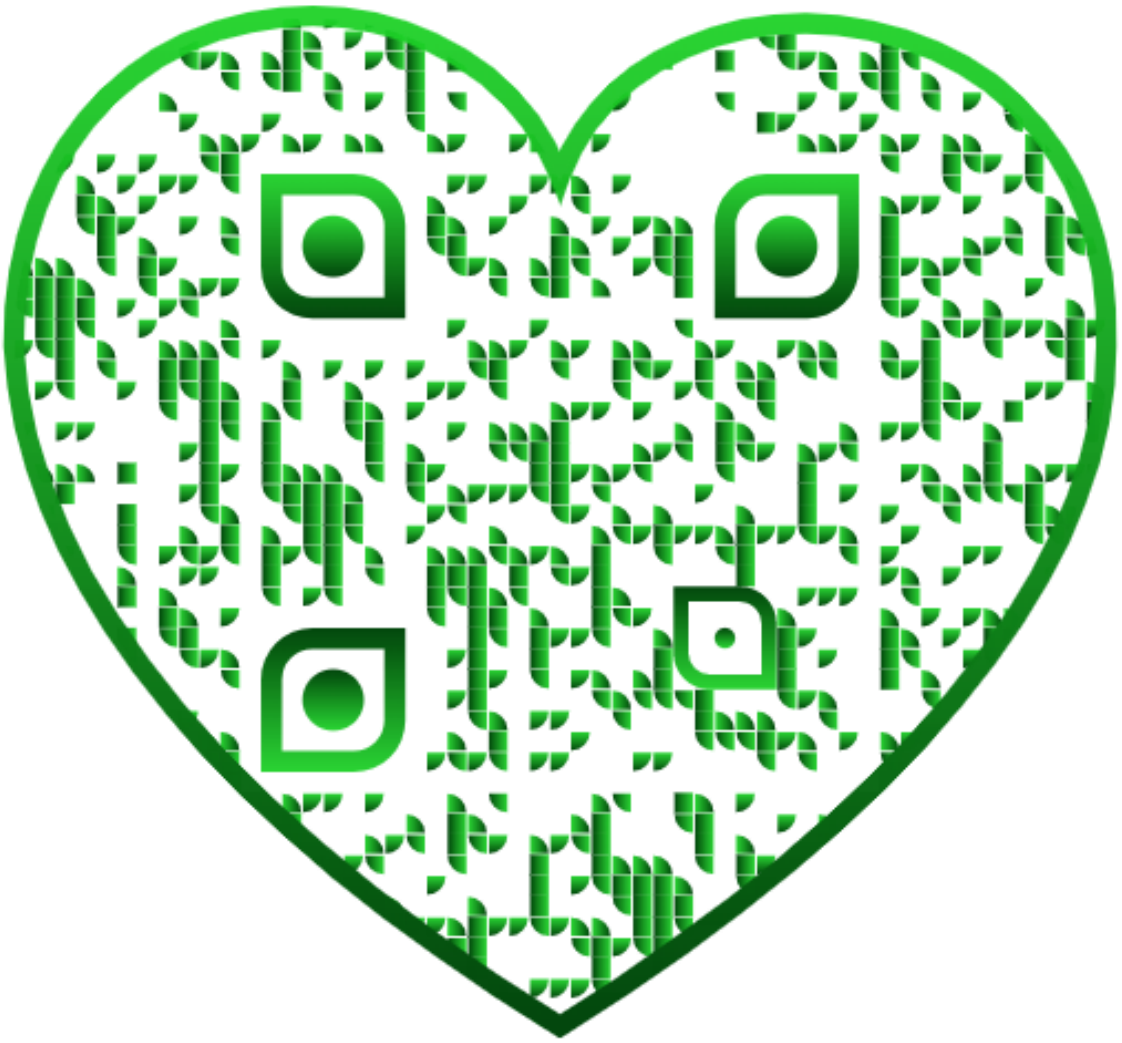

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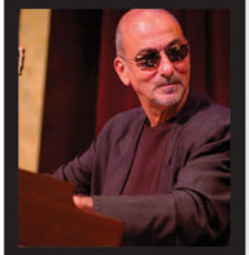

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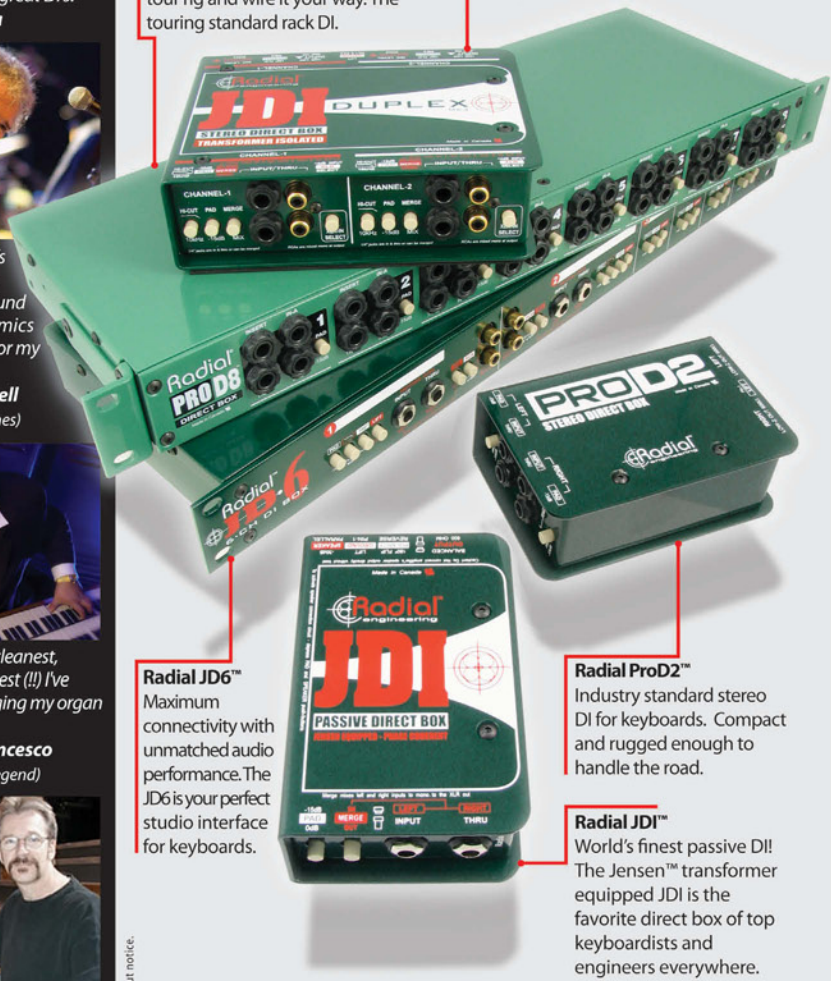

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Editor's Note

Beginning with the runaway success of the Korg M1 in the late 1980s, the term "workstation" has come to mean a multitimbral synth that (A) produces the full gamut of acoustic and synthetic sounds and (B) has a built-in multitrack sequencer so that you can complete a standalone musical production. In response to our saying last month that the Yamaha MX61 synth was not a workstation, Yamaha's Athan Billias offered a different perspective on the term.

"The MX is not a standalone workstation, but it *is* a workstation in the true sense," he emailed me. "*Webster's* defines 'workstation' as an area with equipment for performing a task, or as an intelligent terminal or computer usually connected to a network. When I worked for Korg in Japan and we were trying to name the M1, Korg USA was against the term 'workstation' because they thought it implied something that had to be connected to a computer. Because none of the sounds and effects [on the Yamaha MX] need to be done inside the computer, you could add a $399 netbook and have a very powerful music workstation."

The cynical view of the above is that a company is trying to redefine a neutral term to be more in line with their marketing. A more charitable view recognizes that the "area" definition has precedent: If someone comes over and says, "Show me your workstation," I sweep my hand from Argosy desk and all the gear it contains to my four-tier Jaspers keyboard rack. On the other hand, standalone multitracking synths are powerful and often expensive enough that one can imagine them begging for a name that conveys productivity: "You spent $3,000 on a *keyboard*?" "No, honey. I spent $3,000 on a *workstation*!" Is it time to rethink how we use this term? Reach out to us on social media or by email, and we'll round up the best answers in a future issue.

Stephen Fortner
Editor

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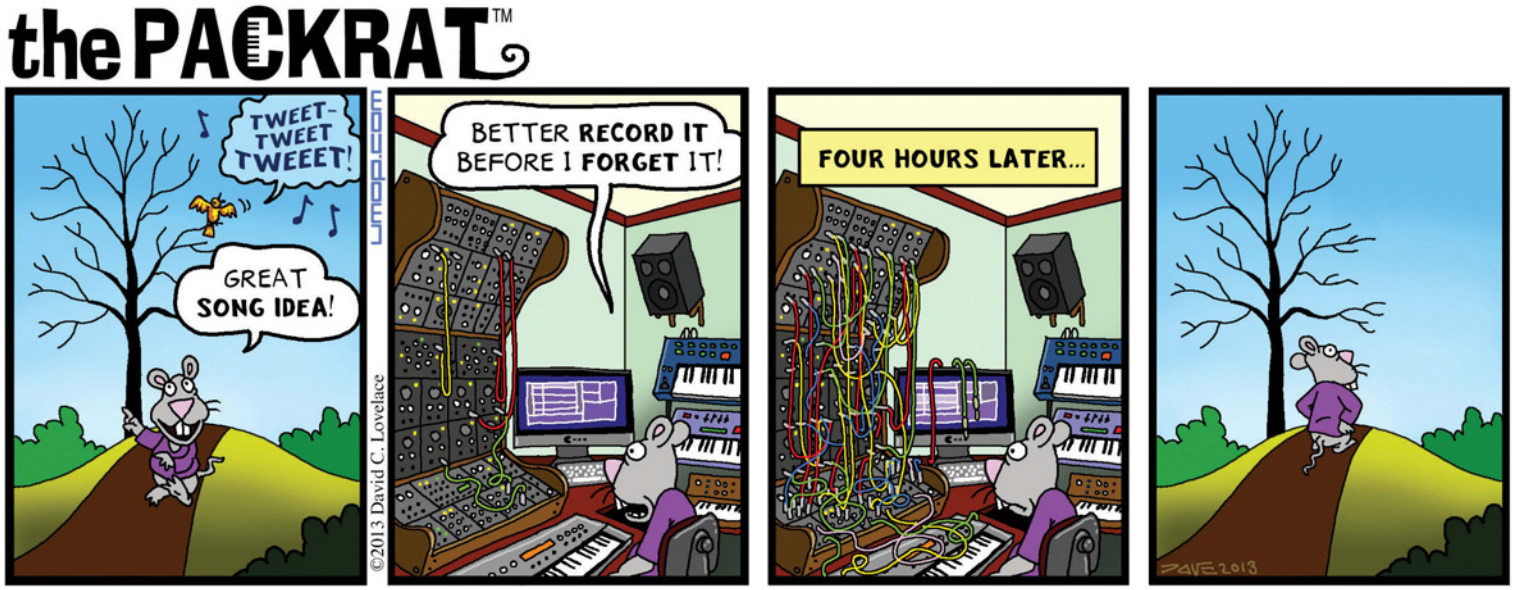
Reader Response of the Month

Digital Disappointment

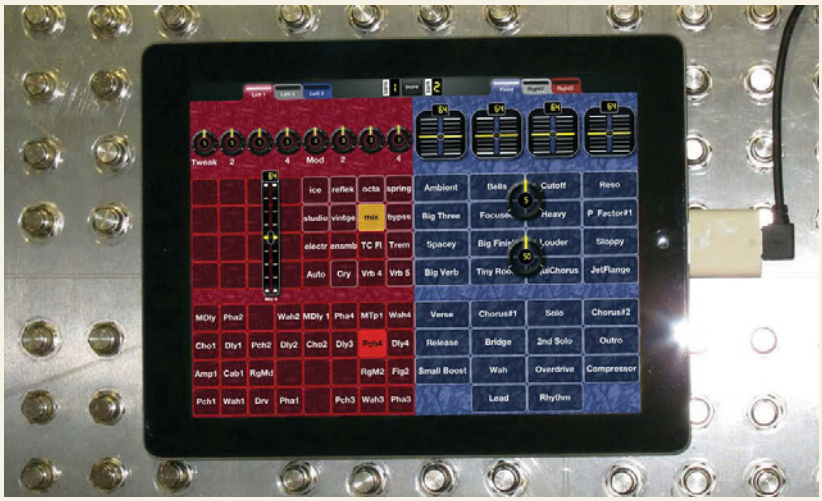
It seems that regardless of the magazine, when it comes to reviewing digital pianos, everybody misses the boat. Playing solo or accompanying a vocalist, you must be able to make the piano *sing* in legato. Nearly every digital piano in my experience suffers from premature initial decay, preventing smooth legato playing. Most often, *B6* is the worst culprit and no, I don't know why. Before you begin any digital piano review, turn the reverb off, because that's what tries to smother the decay issue. One more thing you need is a point of reference: an acoustic piano. A decent upright such as a Kawai K3, Yamaha T118, or something similar would prove eminently suitable. Why you waxed so lyrical in your recent review of the Casio PX-350 is of some concern. Either you all possess cloth ears, or you're serving your advertisers instead of your readers. Leon G. Sack, via email

We agree that decent acoustic pianos have virtues that even good digitals usually don't, legato being a big one. In fact, we have a roundup of affordable acoustic uprights in this issue. However, many of our readers need realistic piano sound, but cartage, cost, and tuning make it unfeasible to take even a small upright to gigs. Also, when miking a piano on a small stage shared by a band, you usually have to keep the gain low to prevent feedback and bleed from other instruments, and in so doing you lose a lot of the tonal benefits of going acoustic. For such reasons, we think judging digital pianos on their own merits of "getting the job done" serves our readers just as much as comparing them to the acoustic ideal. Stephen Fortner



Key Secrets Think Rig

Dan and Mike Rosenstark created a fantastic footswitch by connecting six modified DJ TechTools MIDI Fighter controllers to MIDI Designer Pro, their powerful iOS app (mididesigner.com). A USB hub and Apple Camera Connection Kit route the six outputs from the Fighters into an iPad running MIDI Designer. The app provides a heads-up display for the footswitch settings. It then sends MIDI over an ad-hoc WiFi network to a Mac Mini to control effects in the Reaper DAW. (Dan says the latency is low enough for live performance.) Control is just the beginning: The vibrant MIDI Designer community offers free, downloadable editors for more than a dozen synths. David Battino



My First *Boogie-Woogie*. Gerald Clayton

For rising jazz piano star Gerald Clayton, career-shaping musical inspiration came in the third grade, during an elementary school talent show. "I'd prepared a boogie-woogie piece that my dad had written out," says Gerald, referring to his bassist and bandleader father John Clayton. "At the time, I was playing mostly classical music while listening to a lot of jazz, so playing this boogie piece was a treat for me. I just loved it." Gerald's debut jam proved to be a hit amongst his fellow grade schoolers. "After a lot of silly skits and magic tricks, I played my song," he recalls. "The crowd erupted. It was the first time I felt a rush of energy from a group of people responding to something I played. What a feeling. I knew then that I'd be doing this for the rest of my life." To hear Gerald in action, check out his Grammy-nominated album *Bond: The Paris Sessions* | **geraldclayton.com** | Michael Gallant

NEW GEAR

BY STEPHEN FORTNER

MUSE RESEARCH RECEPTOR TRIO and QU4TTRO

We awarded the Receptor VIP a Key Buy in the Feburary issue for its bang for buck. Wondering if Muse was cooking up a Bigger Bertha for power users? The Trio and Qu4trro represent the new top of the company's time tested line of hardware plug-in hosts. Both use quad core 64-bit Intel chips, with the Qu4ttro doubling the RAM and hard drive sizes of the Trio: 8GB to 16GB and 1TB to 2TB, respectively. Instead of the front panel combo audio inputs on the MuseBox and VIP, the Trio and Qu4ttro come with a PreSonus AudioBox 1818VSL interface that's set up to work right out of the box. The GUI has been updated to access the expanded audio I/O and routing. We'll be testing them soon to see how many silicon-munching soft synths and huge sampled virtual instruments they can handle at once. We expect we'll get tired before the Receptors do. One request, Muse: Lose the "4" unless Audi really objects. **Trio: $2,999 | Qu4ttro: $3,499 | museresearch.com**

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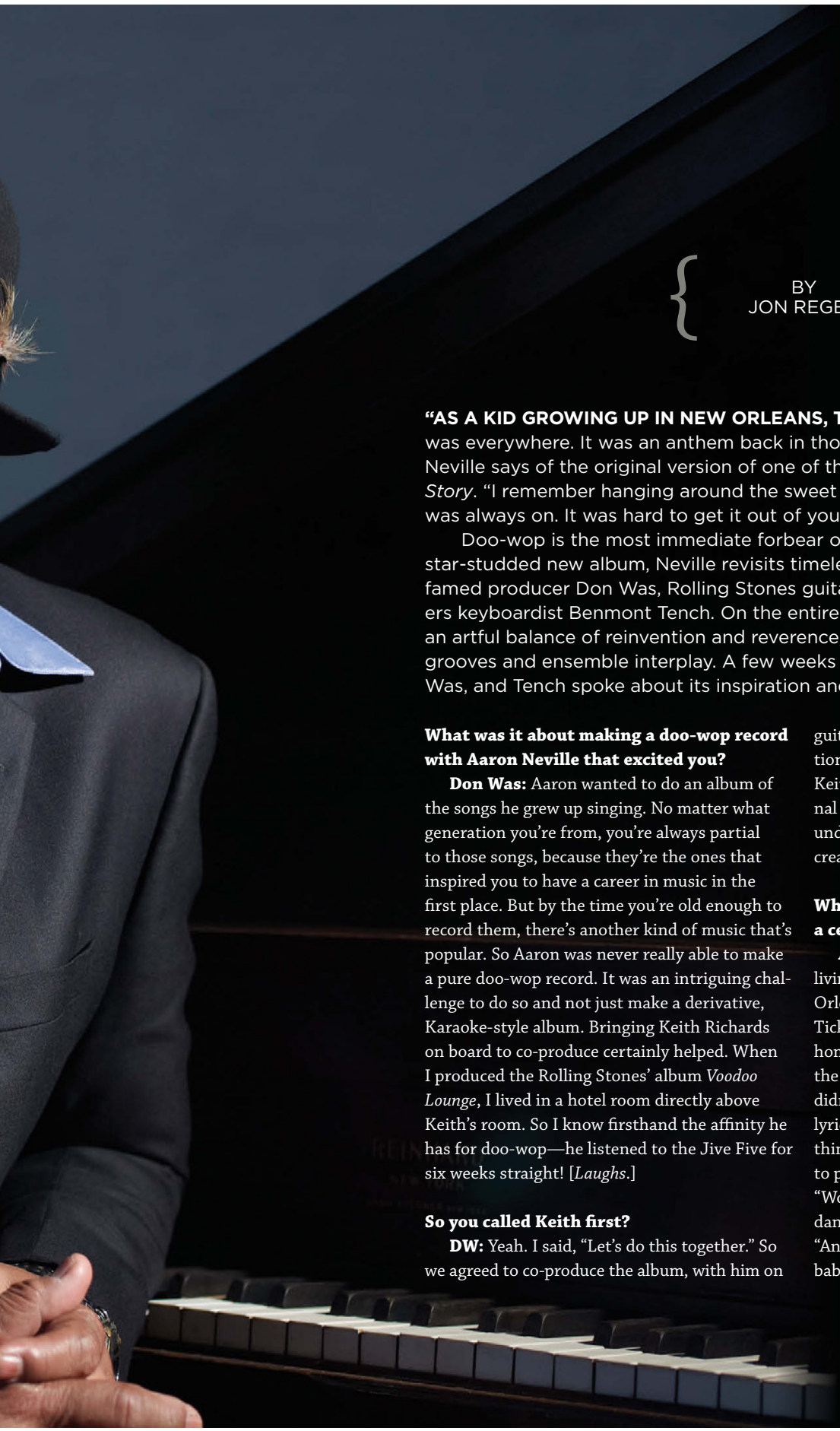


BY
JON REGEN

"AS A KID GROWING UP IN NEW ORLEANS, THE SONG 'WORK WITH ME ANNIE' was everywhere. It was an anthem back in those days," legendary singer Aaron Neville says of the original version of one of the tracks on his latest album, *My True Story*. "I remember hanging around the sweet shop with my friends as a kid, and it was always on. It was hard to get it out of your head!"

Doo-wop is the most immediate forbear of American rock 'n' roll, and on his star-studded new album, Neville revisits timeless doo-wop tracks with the help of famed producer Don Was, Rolling Stones guitarist Keith Richards, and Heartbreakers keyboardist Benmont Tench. On the entire album, Neville and company strike an artful balance of reinvention and reverence, infusing protean classics with gritty grooves and ensemble interplay. A few weeks before the album's release, Neville, Was, and Tench spoke about its inspiration and creative process.

What was it about making a doo-wop record with Aaron Neville that excited you?

Don Was: Aaron wanted to do an album of the songs he grew up singing. No matter what generation you're from, you're always partial to those songs, because they're the ones that inspired you to have a career in music in the first place. But by the time you're old enough to record them, there's another kind of music that's popular. So Aaron was never really able to make a pure doo-wop record. It was an intriguing challenge to do so and not just make a derivative, Karaoke-style album. Bringing Keith Richards on board to co-produce certainly helped. When I produced the Rolling Stones' album *Voodoo Lounge*, I lived in a hotel room directly above Keith's room. So I know firsthand the affinity he has for doo-wop—he listened to the Jive Five for six weeks straight! [*Laughs*.]

So you called Keith first?

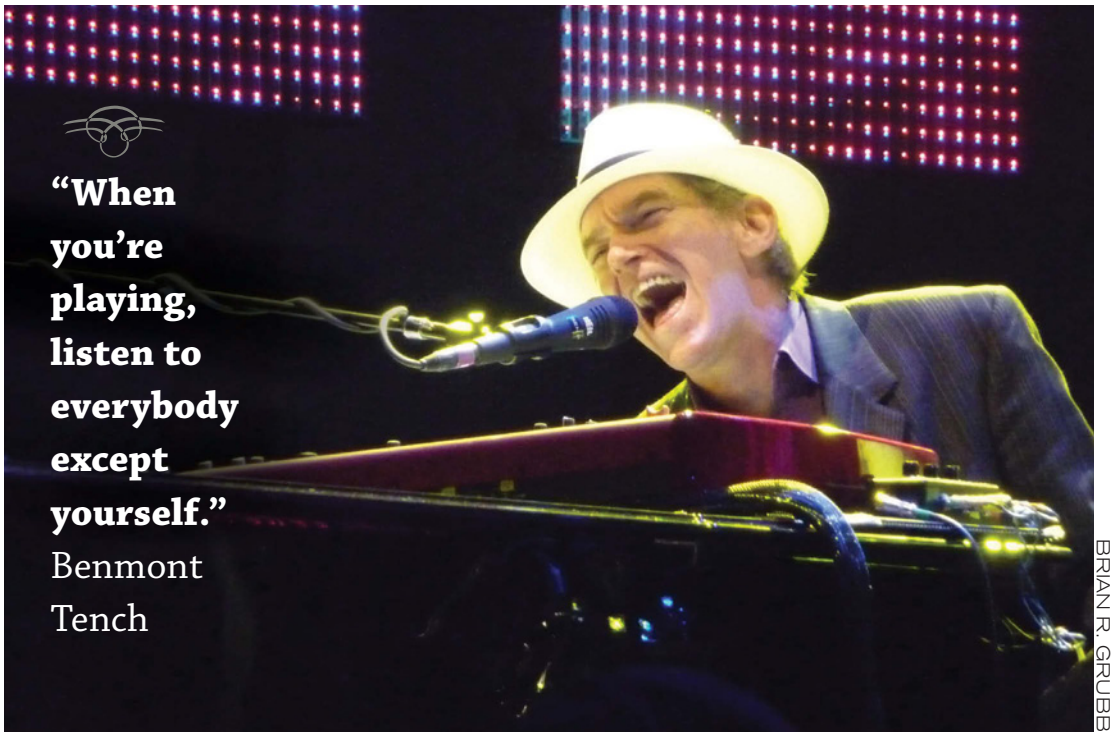
DW: Yeah. I said, "Let's do this together." So we agreed to co-produce the album, with him on guitar. I knew that Keith isn't interested in imitation—in fact, he's diametrically opposed to it. Keith won't learn the guitar parts from the original record and just play them back to you. He'll understand the *feeling* that was there and then create something new.

Why is the track "Work With Me Annie" such a centerpiece of the album for all of you?

Aaron Neville: I was around 12 years old and living in the Calliope housing projects in New Orleans. My brother Art worked at a place called Tickles Record Shop and he'd bring lots of records home. That's when I first heard Hank Ballard and the Midnighters' "Work With Me Annie." They didn't want to play it on the radio because the lyrics were too sexy, which is ironic because most things on the radio today are so racy, you need to plug your ears! At that age, I had no idea what "Work With Me Annie" meant. It was just a cool dance song. Later, they recorded a sequel called "Annie Had a Baby," with the lyrics, "Annie had a baby, she can't work no more!" [*Laughs*.]

DW: "Work With Me Annie" isn't only a seminal record— it's a seminal *keyboard* record. Everybody talks about how racy the lyrics were for their time, and how the song was a forbear of suggestive rock music. It's often cited as being one of the earliest rock 'n' roll records, even though it's slightly *pre*-rock 'n' roll, coming out in 1954. But one of the really important features of the song is the piano playing by Sonny Thompson. He played on a lot of early James Brown records, and other things for the King Records label. Sonny was at least a year ahead of what [pianist] Johnnie Johnson was doing on Chuck Berry's first record, in terms of applying boogie-woogie piano to rock 'n' roll. So his piano part on the song is incredibly significant.

Benmont Tench: I heard that song as a teenager, on a compilation of '50s music. I just loved the feel of it. So playing it with Aaron and [drummer] George Receli, who are such deep musicians and come by that feel naturally, along with everybody else on the record like Keith and [guitarist] Greg Leisz was just remarkable. I was overjoyed to be part of it.



BRIAN R. GRUBB

Aaron, between you first hearing "Work With Me Annie" as a kid and now recording it for the new album, did you perform it live?

AN: I mostly performed it on duet gigs, and I'd tell the audience the story of how I learned it. But I never recorded it before. When I brought up the idea of including it on the album, Don immediately said, "We've gotta do that song." Keith said the same thing—it's almost like he and I grew up on the same block, because we both listened to the same things growing up.

How did you go about re-interpreting it in the studio?

AN: We were trying to bring the song up to date, but at the same time be true to the spirit of where it came from. I always liked Hank Ballard's voice and the harmonies in the song. So when we got into the studio, I tried to peg up the groove a bit, because the original version really lays back on the beat. I showed George the groove I was thinking about by motioning to him with my whole body. And he picked it right up. It was really about giving the song an attitude.

DW: I remember that the instant before we started recording the song, Aaron looked at George, and there was a "New Orleans moment." Aaron did a sort of strut and a handclap that suggested a New Orleans rhythm. That kind of thing is second nature to George—he knew exactly what Aaron was talking about. We didn't do any rehearsals. I think we even used the first take on the album.

That one rhythmic change puts the song in a totally different place. It's what you hope a remake will be—fresh but familiar.

DW: Totally. It's a doo-wop song, so we kept the lead and background vocals almost identical to the original. But in the moment, the groove went New Orleans on us!

I'll tell you a story—when I met Leon Russell for the first time in the 1990s, I asked him, "What's the difference between making records today and making them in the '50s and '60s?" He told me, "In the '60s, if you handed in your album and someone from the record company said, 'Oh. I love it. It reminds me of *this* artist,' those were fighting words. You could *punch* your A&R guy for saying that. In the last couple of decades, if you *can't* go to your record company and say, 'This album is a cross between *this* artist and *that* artist,' the label won't know what to do with it. It's all about demonstrating precedent for the marketing department."

Another facet of "Work With Me Annie" is Benmont's rollicking piano solo. How did that come to fruition?

DW: Benmont heard what George was doing rhythmically, and about 12 seconds into his solo, he went "Professor Longhair" on it. His solo is absolutely riveting. While he was playing, everyone in the studio stopped and stared. He's an extremely versatile musician who has absorbed many styles. I've been making records and playing live with him for over 30 years, but I've *never* heard him play like that! It just came out of him.

BT: It *does* come from Professor Longhair and the rhythm of New Orleans in general. For me, it's a push-pull feel that really depends on the rhythm section. And the rhythm section on Aaron's record swung like crazy! They understood that kind of rhythm-and-blues, "second line" New Orleans groove. [Pianist and session musician] Larry Knechtel was a big influence on me as well. He played piano on Johnny Rivers' version of "Rockin' Pneumonia." That's where I first heard that kind of feel, long before I went to New Orleans and started getting into Doctor John, the Meters, and the great piano players Toots Washington and Allen Toussaint. Then, the way that Aaron sings makes you react rhythmically. You don't want to get in the way of that voice. You want to spend as much time *listening* as you do playing, because it's so pleasurable.

I have to say that solo was almost a complete accident. I was like, "I'm taking a solo? Damn!" It was kind of like my fingers stumbled over each other in places and we ended up with that solo. I wasn't in charge of it—it took control of itself!

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DON WAS ON TAPE VERSUS DIGITAL

"There's no question that there's an incredible sound to two-inch tape," says Blue Note Records President Don Was, who co-produced Aaron Neville's *My True Story* with Keith Richards. "In fact, we mixed the album *to* tape out of Pro Tools. Tape does provide a glue of sorts—it's like a Jell-o mold that warms things up. But it's really about how you use the tools at your disposal.

"When I produced John Mayer's *Born and Raised*, John and his engineer Chad Franscoviak thought the album needed to go to two-inch tape to sound organic, but they'd never recorded to tape before. But Chad, like a lot of great young engineers, had already come up with his own method for adding warmth to Pro Tools. I'm not saying you can make digital sound identical to tape, but you can use plug-ins to bring that kind of warmth to a mix. So on John Mayer's album, when Chad used his process and then added two-inch tape on *top* of that, along with recording through a vintage Neve console, it was just way too dark. So we dispensed with tape after the second day, and it turned out to be a great sounding record. Any advantage we would have gotten from tape, we'd already compensated for digitally."

GABI PORTER

Left to right: Benmont Tench, Don Was, Keith Richards, and Aaron Neville.

SARAH A FRIEDMAN

AN: Benmont went back to that song's era with his solo, just like everyone in the band did. You can hear the smiles come through the record—that's how much fun all of us had making it.

Don, can you talk about why Benmont is still considered the gold standard when it comes to *taste* at rock keyboards?

DW: Benmont's playing amazes on a number of different levels—from the practical to the magical. First of all, he *is* one of the most tasteful musicians you'll ever hear, and he's the exact opposite of a show-off. Not a note he plays is designed to draw attention to *him*. He plays to support the music at hand. Secondly, he's listened to a whole lot of things, and he has a knack for making different styles his own. Though his solo on "Work With Me Annie" was influenced by Professor Longhair, it didn't sound like him. It's Benmont's take on that sound, and because it's coming naturally to him, it's every bit as authentic as the original.

The third thing that Benmont does that's totally mystical and not something you can teach is that he has a natural instinct for where to lend support without getting in the way. That's the biggest danger for keyboard players. If you start playing notes where the singer is singing, what's the singer going to do? If the singer phrases a certain way and it clashes with what the keyboard player is doing, then it sounds like the singer has no rhythm. Willie Nelson is a good example of that. For years, people thought he had no sense of time. They threw him out of Nashville because he didn't fit their rigid musical formula. But as soon as he got to Austin and got a band that left *space* for him to sing in, people realized he was a phrasing genius. Benmont is always anticipating where the singer is going and staying out of his or her way. So he's tremendously supportive, and on top of that, he always comes up with an emotional component that cuts straight through to your heart. He's as gifted a musician as I've ever met.

BT: I've just always loved that kind of playing. Also, Denny Cordell, who produced the first few Heartbreakers records, along with Tom Petty and [Heartbreakers guitarist] Mike Campbell, taught me how to play around vocals and guitars. I've never wanted to be anything but part of an ensemble. You have to be aware, and you have to pay attention, but you also have to get into a zone where you're not totally conscious. You have to let the song play itself. Someone once wrote, "When you're playing, listen to everybody except yourself." It's such good advice but so damned hard to do, especially when you take a solo. It's a very Zen thing.

Aaron, what is it about songs from the doo-wop era that still affects you today?

AN: Maybe it's because when I listen to them and sing them, it takes me back to my youth and my innocence. I can still remember what I was doing back then—who I was with, and that sense of adventure and possibility you have as a kid. That kid inside me never left. ♫

SOUNDCLOUD

Aaron Neville discusses "Work With Me Annie" and the making of *My True Story*.

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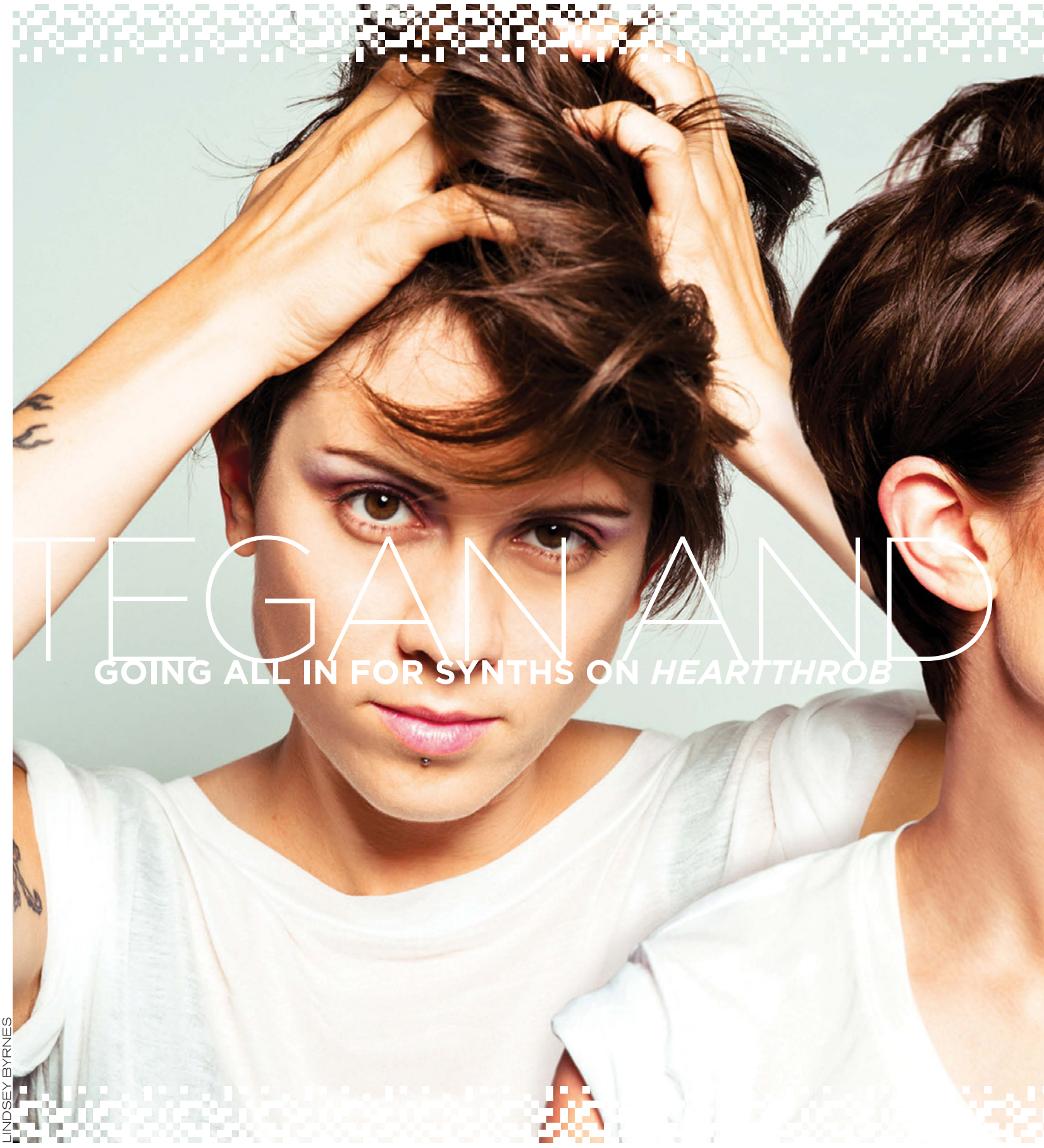


TEGAN AND

GOING ALL IN FOR SYNTHS ON *HEARTTHROB*

LINDSEY BYRNES

BY ROBBIE GENNET

THE QUIN SISTERS HAVE GONE FROM UNDERGROUND BUZZ TO mainstream success over the last decade. After their breakthrough album *So Jealous* (2004), their evolution is most evident in the arc of *The Con* (2007), *Sainthood* (2009), and their newest creation, *Heartthrob*. From their early cassette releases onward, Tegan and Sara have defined themselves with smart lyrics, hooky songs, and on this most recent record, a whole lot of synths—a decidedly new direction for which the Quins credit principal producer Greg Kurstin as well as Justin Meldal-Johnsen and Mike Elizondo. Tegan and Kurstin spoke to *Keyboard* about the songs and synths behind this reinvention.

How has your writing process evolved since your last records?

Tegan Quin: *Heartthrob* is our seventh full-length record and I just think our experience is showing through. We take more time to make records and I think we've become less precious and instead more particular about what songs we choose to record, who we choose to record with, and the aesthetic we go with on each record, which is all about confidence and which is part of our evolution as well. The writing benefits from all of this.

***Heartthrob* has more of an electronic sound, with keyboards more at the forefront. Was there a conscious decision to change your sound?**

TQ: Our foray into dance, hip-hop, and pop collaborations over the last six years has influenced us. We were always interested in pop production and pop music, but I think we felt like we were the "indie rock twins" and had to hold ourselves back when it came to the sonic smoothing out of vocals and instrumentation. With *So Jealous* and *The Con*, we really embraced our keyboard-loving selves, and after our dip back into "rock" with *Sainthood*, we were ready to lose the guitars for a bit. We have a gigantic back catalogue of "guitar rock" songs and it would be boring if we just did another record that sounded like that. I also think that the fan response to the collaborations and to our own songs like "Alligator" showed us that we had some room to be creative.

How did the initial collaboration process work between band and producer?

TQ: The first hour of the first day we recorded with Greg, we saw that he was going to take what we had created and effortlessly transform it into what we had imagined but might not have had the gear or ability to create ourselves. We were able to sit back and have perspective, share ideas, and make suggestions without feeling the usual cloudiness of being too close to the recording. It was as if he were two people: the producer *and* the session musician hero who you beg to play on your record!

Greg Kurstin: They had great demos and great songs to begin with, and many great synth ideas on the demos. I felt a lot of support from them to go crazy and add anything I wanted. They would chill on the couch and I'd turn around every now and then and say, "Do you like that?" That freedom made me want to push myself sonically. It was such a great experience.

Did many synth sounds make it from the demo to the final versions? And did you have MIDI tracks to help replace the demo sounds?

GK: Sometimes I would take the MIDI and change the sound, or use a real analog synth, but in every song there's *something* from the demo. On "Closer," the synth pads were in the demo but I replaced them with a Roland Juno-60. The pre-chorus of "Closer" has some ascending synth parts that are from the demo. I replaced a couple of the sounds but used the MIDI.

TQ: A few songs still have some of our original keyboards on them ["Goodbye, Goodbye," "Couldn't Be Your Friend," "Shock To Your System"], and there are two songs that still have Sara's demo vocals ["Shock To Your System," "How Come You

SOUND HOUND

Producer Greg Kurstin gave us some hard data on the keyboards he used on Tegan and Sara's *Heartthrob*. Read a more detailed discussion of *how* they were used at keyboardmag.com/may2013.

"CLOSER"
- **Roland Jupiter-4:** arpeggios at the end of each chorus and bridge.
- **Logic ES2:** some high square wave bleeps through Logic's tape delay and guitar amp plug-ins.
- **Roland Juno-60:** throughout.
- **EXS24 in Logic:** most drums and sound effects.

"GOODBYE, GOODBYE"
- **Korg MiniKorg:** high vibrato lead on the chorus.
- **Access Virus TI2:** main synth stabs, such as the plucky sounds.
- **Roland Juno-60:** main synth stabs.

"I WAS A FOOL"
- **ARP String Ensemble:** high strings.
- **Bechstein concert grand:** piano.
- **Korg Polysix and Casio CZ-1000:** plucky sounds.

"LOVE THEY SAY"
- **Elka Panther organ through delay, Wurlitzer through Space Echo, and EXS24 percussion through CamelPhat:** feedback swells.
- **Logic ES2:** some of the high gated synth, and the high sawtooth leads at the end.
- **Mellotron M400:** guitar pluck sample.
- **Farfisa Soundmaker:** some of the low saw wave drones.

"NOW I'M ALL MESSED UP"
- **Mellotron M400:** high strings in bridge.
- **Wurlitzer through Space Echo:** high bleeps.
- **Access Virus TI2:** high plucks and arpeggio bass.
- **Bechstein through CamelPhat plug-in:** piano parts.

Elka Panther

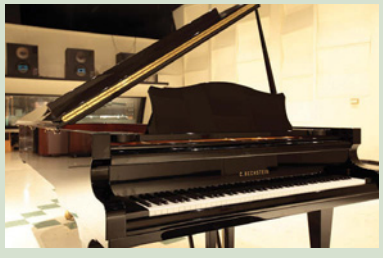
Roland Juno-60

Farfisa Soundmaker

ARP String Ensemble

Mellotron M400

Sylenth


Bechstein at EastWest Studios

Don't Want Me"], but that's it. We wrote half of the songs on keyboard and piano ["Closer," "All Messed Up," "Shock To Your System," "Couldn't Be Your Friend," "Goodbye, Goodbye"], and so as soon as we got into the studio, Greg replaced our piano and keyboard sounds with better sounds and performances. The remaining tracks were a mixture of us playing keyboards and guitars, and Justin [Meldal-Johnsen] and Greg playing the remaining instruments.

Considering all the keyboards on the album, were you able to use your bandmates in the studio?

TQ: Making *Heartthrob* was like going to summer camp. On Mars. And there were only two seats in the space shuttle. Sara and I went into this record alone. We didn't bring any past collaborators into the fold with us. But [longtime bandmate] Ted Gowans is definitely doing an incredible job on the live versions of the songs.

What are the main keyboards on the record?

GK: My main soft synths are Logic ES2 and Lennar Digital Sylenth. I like ReFX Nexus but didn't use it on this album. As to new synths, I used the Access Virus TI2. Old synths? Mainly the Roland Juno-60 and Jupiter-4, Korg Polysix and MiniKorg, Casio CZ-1000 and SK-5, Arp String Ensemble, Mellotron M400, and Wurly.

Was there any programming of keys or drums?

GK: There's a lot of drum programming. Joey Waronker played real drums and I'd lock them up with the programmed stuff. I had completely programmed the songs at first and then Joey played on top of that to make it sound bigger. For keyboard programming, I have a lot of my analog stuff sampled into EXS24 in Logic, so sometimes I might program it, or play the real thing depending on my mood.

What is your current stage configuration and how has it evolved from your last tour?

TQ: We have a six-piece band now, one more than in the past. We have Jason McGerr on drums and triggering stuff. Ted Gowans is mainly playing guitar but also plays a bit of keyboard. Jasper Leak is on bass and keyboard bass. And we are about to hire a dedicated musician to play keyboard and piano exclusively. It frees up Ted to play more guitar. And although I love to write on keyboards, I find that I have to use too much of my brain power to play *and* sing live and the singing ends up suffering. So it'll be a relief to have a sixth player devoted to keys!

How do you see yourself fitting into the great legacy of independent Canadian music?

TQ: Ha! You might be asking too much of a Canadian! [*Laughs.*] But I can say that I think Canadian music is fantastic. With so much great history, young Canadian bands often start up with very clear and lofty goals of becoming great bands like those before. We also have an incredibly supportive grant program in Canada that helps young bands make records, tour, and promote their work. We benefited greatly from those grants early in our career. We also have rules about playing a certain amount of Canadian music on the airwaves and television and I think that fosters growth and encourages the up-and-coming bands. ♫

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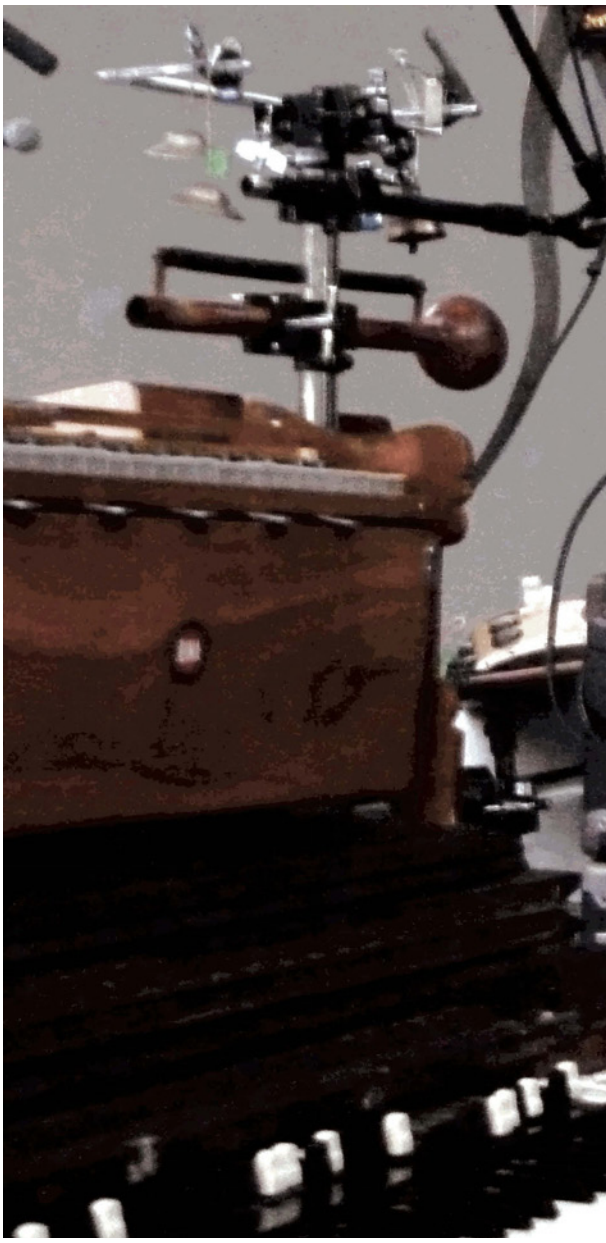
MICK ROSSI

SONIC ADVENTURES WITH PAUL SIMON

BY RICHARD LEITER



IT WAS A CRYSTALLINE EVENING AT THE GREEK THEATER IN THE BERKELEY HILLS overlooking San Francisco Bay. Just moments before headliner Paul Simon walked on-stage, a small earthquake shook the 100-year-old outdoor amphitheater. Five thousand people gasped, then cheered. But the real earthquake was to come 45 minutes later.

Paul Simon's eight-piece virtuoso band rocked the night, re-inventing his classics and sharing his most recent album, *So Beautiful or So What?* At the end of "Peace Like a River," Simon nodded at keyboard player and percussionist Mick Rossi, and suddenly the Steinway was the only thing sounding onstage. It was like nothing you've ever heard at a rock concert: Mick was improvising a cadenza that was an explosion of what sounded like Philip Glass meets Shostakovich meets Bruce Hornsby, and it *grooved*.

Rossi is one of those players who has 300 years of classical repertoire in his back pocket as well as the chops to cut any pop gig. He's played and recorded with Kelly Clarkson, Leonard Cohen, Hall and Oates, Randy Newman, Carly Simon, and the Mahavishnu Project. But you also might see him performing at Lincoln Center with the New York Philharmonic or at Carnegie Hall with Philip Glass. His sudden, improvised cadenza was an honest and thrilling blend of pop and 20th-century classical, and thus a calling card for whom he is as a musician—but how did it wind up in the middle of a Paul Simon concert?

Mick explains: "I've been Philip Glass' pianist, percussionist, assistant conductor, collaborator, and soloist for over 11 years. One day I get a message on my answering machine: "This is Paul Simon. I'm a friend of Philip Glass.' I'm thinking, 'Paul Simon? Of course I know who this is!' He asked me if I wanted to play on the new record. That was about two years ago. Then he called again and asked, "Do you want to join the band? I don't know if you're into that kind of thing." I'm thinking, 'Are you *kidding*?'" [*Laughs*.]

Of course, that kind of phone call is a once-in-a-lifetime thrill. So much of making it is paying one's dues with thousands of street-level gigs, something first impressed upon Mick by his father, a highly regarded accordion player who lived in Trenton, New Jersey and worked the New York scene. "Dad, to his deep regret, once turned down the Lawrence Welk gig and never let me forget it," Mick recalls. "He'd hear my latest record and say, 'This is nice, but why don't you play standards? Something people will like!'"

Preparing for the Paul Simon tour wasn't the usual three-weeks-on-a-rented-rehearsal-stage schedule. Mick explains: "Paul rehearsed the band at his place in Connecticut for five months. He'd play a recording or two of his. They were very simple yet highly sophisticated pieces—you'd listen to it once and you'd know where he's going. We didn't see a single chart, but his orchestration ideas are very deep. We've got really creative musicians up there and everybody doubles or triples on instruments, but he didn't want everybody playing at once. That's why the rehearsal periods were so long. He's very open to and interested in us doing what we do—the weirder the better. I taped together electric bass strings and laid them over the piano strings—it sounds like a harpsichord, only more ugly. He loved it. I think the *process* is even more important to him than doing the gig. He'd heard my new solo piano record—which is 99 percent improvised—with prepared piano and he got excited about the sound. That sort of experimentation is what I get excited about, too."

Mick's personal music, and there's a lot of it, is anything but standard: "I'm all about pushing the music forward. Why play the same old thing?

SOUNDCLOUD

Listen and learn this excerpt from Mick's *Lockdown*—with downloadable audio and notation—and you'll be ready for any gig.

Visit mickrossi.com for Mick's tour schedule with Philip Glass, Paul Simon, and others.

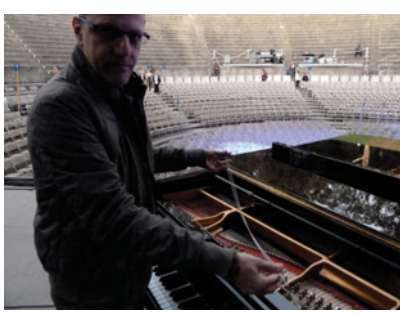
keyboardmag.com/may2013

I want to make it messy. I just did an event at New York's Museum of Modern Art, fully improvised, in an installation by Carlito Carvalhosa, a Brazilian artist. People were a foot from the piano, closer than they ever get at concerts. I even brought some sheet music in that I didn't play—some Shostakovich and Scriabin. I just put it on top of the strings."

Mick's records run the gamut from pristine jazz quintets to his current album of improvised and endlessly fascinating solo piano, *Songs From the Broken Land*, which is a gold mine for keyboard players who are tired of the same old ideas. The record is a primer on fusing impeccable technique with irreverent imagination: small, intense pieces that all ask the question, what new thing can one do by ignoring all the rules that one nonetheless knows so well. See the six variations on *My Old Kentucky Home* for cases in point.

The hard work never ends. At the end of the seismically-active Paul Simon concert, Mick showed us his night's homework: page after page of *prestissimo* eighth-notes. When his performance day ends, Mick returns to his hotel room to prepare for the upcoming Philip Glass tour. That should be more inspiring than daunting. Every minute of practice, every hour of concentration, brings us closer to the kind of freedom and mastery to which we all aspire—and which Mick Rossi has achieved.

Mick is no exception to the rule that everyone in Paul Simon's band plays two or three instruments. Left to right: Steinway D, Hammond C-3 organ, the very same Rhodes that Richard Tee played on "Still Crazy After All These Years," harmonium (a portable hand-pumped reed organ), hand drum, percussion, and mallets.



Mick lays these electric bass strings across the piano strings for a prepared-piano effect he likens to an ugly harpsichord.

Van Cliburn
1934 – 2013

COMPILED BY JON REGEN

AT 23 YEARS OLD, HARVEY LAVAN CLIBURN WON THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL Tchaikovsky Piano Competition in Moscow. For an American pianist to do so in 1958, at the height of the Cold War, became the recital heard 'round the world. His myriad accomplishments include performing for every U.S. president from Truman to Obama and, of course, founding the competition that bears his name—which is now widely regarded as the Olympics of classical piano. He passed away on February 27 of this year, and pianists reached out to us with their remembrances. For more, visit keyboardmag.com/vancliburn.

As a young pianist growing up in the United States, I idolized Van Cliburn and what he was able to accomplish. During my years at Steinway and Sons, I got to know Mr. Cliburn well and was thankful to consider him a friend. Often when we get to know our idols, they lose some of their luster. With Van, the sense of awe and admiration that he inspired never waned. **—Ron Losby, President, Steinway and Sons—Americas**

Van Cliburn was a towering pianist and history-making hero, yet it's his generosity of spirit that will resound most poignantly in our memories and hearts. As young aspiring pianists, [musical partner] Greg Anderson and I both grew up on his recordings of the warhorse concerti, and I recall being obsessed with the TV documentary of the 1993 Van Cliburn International Piano Competition, in which he left an indelible impression on me with his earnest support for the competitors. I finally met him at the piano competition in Fort Worth a dozen years later, and I was awestruck by his tremendous warmth and good will. From afar, he was an icon of nearly mythic proportions, yet in person, he was the paragon of down-to-earth kindness and old-fashioned Texan charm. He leaves behind a significant musical legacy, but his impact transcends the concert stage. He remains a shining example of what every artist can strive to be: a cultural ambassador uniting and inspiring humanity. **—Elizabeth Joy Roe, on behalf of Anderson and Roe**

Van Cliburn will be forever etched in our collective memory as a magnanimous artist and human being, a master at the keyboard and for his enviably large hands! His name will remain synonymous with his unique largesse of spirit and music making of great character, beauty and poise. I had the honor of meeting Van just once in Fort Worth. I will personally remember him as a hero, not only for his great achievements—one of them being the Gold Medal at the Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow at a time in history when that was nothing short of miraculous for an American—but equally because he soared as a human being through his kindness and generosity. **—Gabriela Montero**

When I think about Van Cliburn, I think, more than anything else, about a different America—an America that threw a ticker-tape parade for a 23-year-old classical pianist and then bought a million copies of his record of the Tchaikovsky Concerto. Of course, the extra-musical implications of Cliburn's win in Moscow were monumental, but still, this was classical music, and America cared. Cliburn himself felt the meaning of that in the moment. At the parade's end, he addressed the crowd, 'I appreciate more than you will ever know that you are honoring me, but the thing that thrills me the most is that you are honoring classical music.' Cliburn stood for art and music not being the province of a privileged few, but a treasure to be enjoyed and aspired to by many. **—Lara Downes**

I never thought classical piano could change the world. Van Cliburn did just that. **—Jenny Lin**

Van playing for a rapt audience in the Great Hall of the Moscow Conservatory during the Tchaikovsky Competition (April 1958).

Van Cliburn with former President Harry S. Truman, Kansas City, April 6, 1962.

RUTH DAVID

On March 2, 2011 President Barack Obama honored Mr. Cliburn with the National Medal of Arts in a ceremony at the White House.

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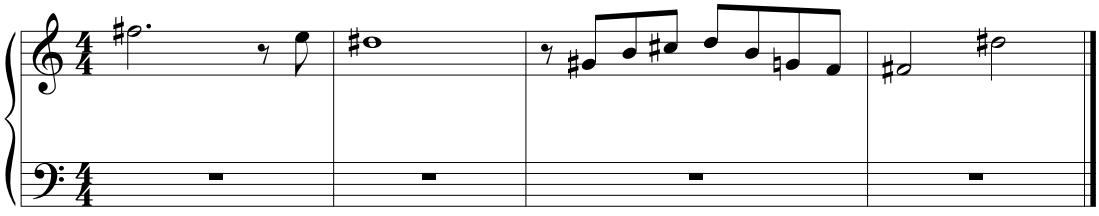
MARC MCANDREWS

A STRATEGY FOR Solo Jazz Piano

BY ELDAR DJANGIROV

THE PIANO IS A VIRTUAL SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA ARRANGED IN A LINEAR FASHION. WITH IT, YOU CAN CREATE MELODY, underpin it with harmony, and keep it in time with rhythm—all by yourself. Playing piano solo has been a subject that I've studied for years. I started out taking classical piano lessons with my mother, and there was great emphasis from the beginning for me to play music by myself. It wasn't until later that I started playing in trios or groups. For that reason, I've always searched out pieces of musical vocabulary that I can learn and apply in a solo setting. The way pianists use the instrument in a solo format has always been a measure of their mastery of craft. In this lesson, we'll take a melody line and give it progressively more harmonic foundation and rhythmic movement, all in a solo context.

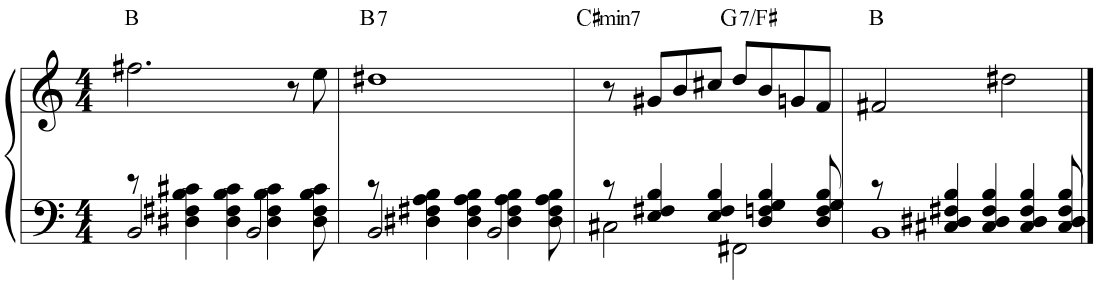
Ex. 1.



1. Melodic Beginnings

Ex. 1 is a four-bar melody taken from my song "Hope," from my new album *Breakthrough*. We will use this as the starting point for our solo piano explorations.

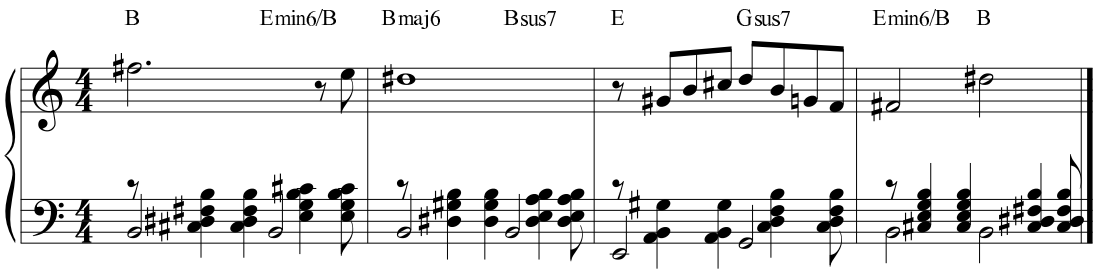
Ex. 2.



2. Melody Plus Basic Harmony

Ex. 2 features the melody from Ex. 1, but adds a basic harmonic structure to support it. It's basically the *I* chord, followed by a *ii-V-I* turnaround sequence. This chord sequence is a good launching point to support the melody. Here, the left hand supplies the bass notes as well as the harmony.

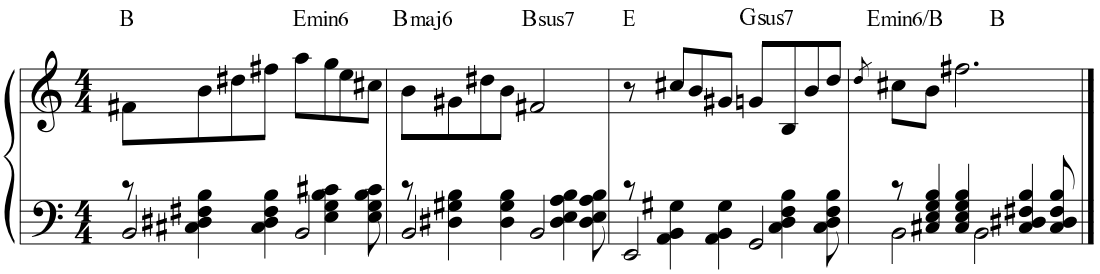
Ex. 3.

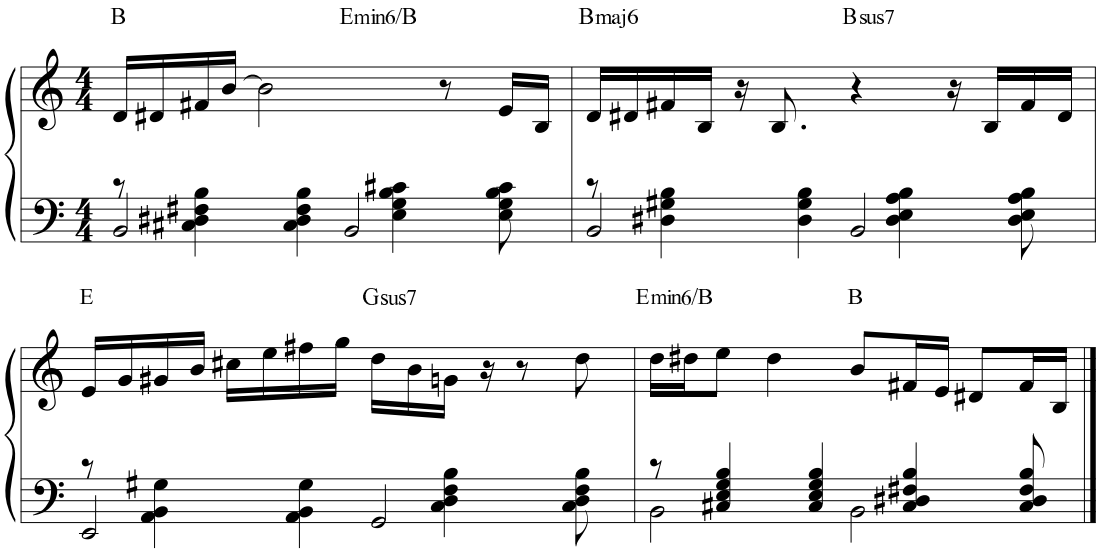


3. Melody With Extended Harmony

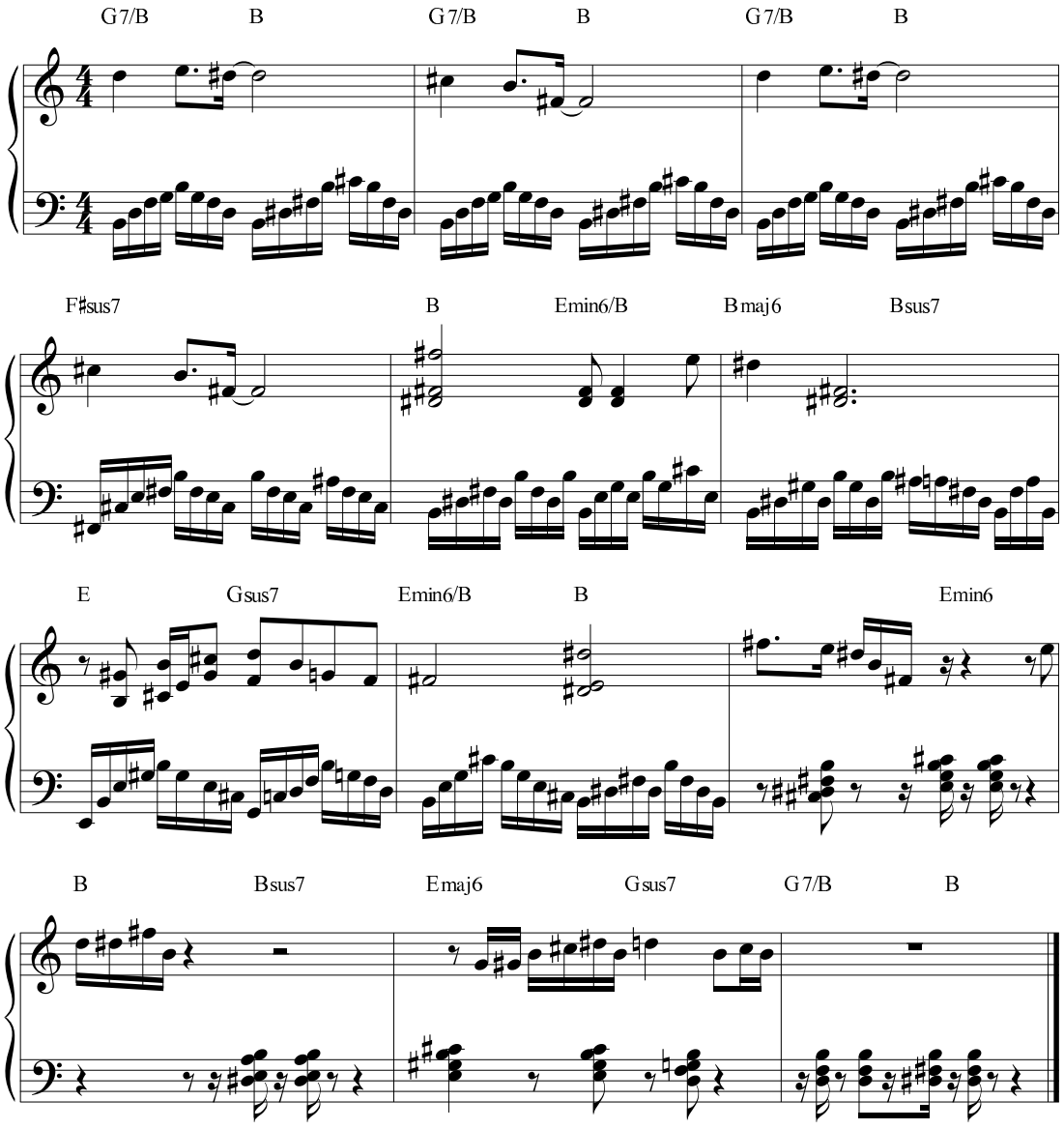
Ex. 3 demonstrates alternate harmonies for our melody. This harmonic scheme makes the melody sing more, and imparts a bit more yearning to it. The resolutions inherent in this harmonic sequence help create tension and release in the music. This occurs because of the voice leading that happens in the left hand. Watch for certain notes to go up or down a half-step or whole-step, while other notes stay persistent throughout the progression.

Ex. 4a.



Ex. 4b.

4. Melodic Improvisation

Ex. 4a is an improvisation that outlines the harmonic sequence while referring back to the original melody. **Ex. 4b** introduces a blues inflection to the improvisation's sound. It also references the melody and again creates tension and release, especially when the harmony goes from *E* major to *G7*. When your listeners hear these ideas after hearing the melody, they'll still remember the original melody to which these musical extensions refer.

Ex. 5.

5. Improvised Introduction with Cadence and Comping

Ex. 5 is an improvised introduction comprised of a short motif that offers tension and release while referring back to the original melody. There's a left-hand cadence that underpins the melody while also creating a wave of sound that outlines the harmony. The last four bars demonstrate rhythmic chord comping (accompaniment) in the left hand, while the right hand spins variations on the original melody. This example demonstrates that you can outline the chord changes and harmony through *movement* rather than just chorded structures. Again, what makes these movements logical and musical is the relationship between the chords the tones have in common and the voice leading: Certain notes are moving while others remain constant.

Watch Eldar play "Darn That Dream."

Play-along audio examples.

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Listening List

"The challenge of playing solo piano lies with making the music interesting. The three elements of melody, harmony, and time have to be combined in a cohesive way for a performance to be both musical and logical," says jazz pianist and composer **Eldar Djangirov**. "Musicians like Oscar Peterson, Chick Corea, Keith Jarrett, and Bill Evans have been tremendous sources of inspiration for me in this regard." Here are three albums Eldar recommends for a study of masterful solo piano. His own new recordings, *Breakthrough* and *Bach/Brahms/Prokofiev*, are out now. Learn more at eldarmusic.com.

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Octaves with Finesse

BY MICHAEL GALLANT

LOGAN GRENDEL

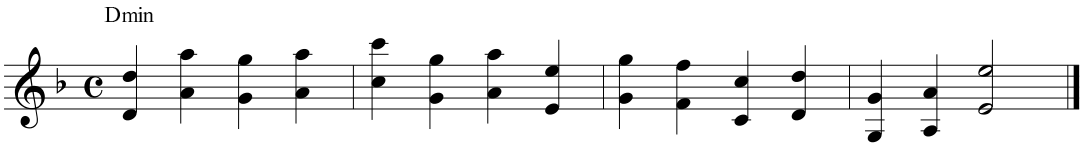
WHEN I'M RECORDING AND IMPROVISING LIVE, I LOVE THE POWER that comes from playing melodies in octaves with my right hand. But I always try to use them with taste and moderation. Just like a trumpeter playing high notes for too long, or a guitarist serving up an endless array of power chords, a keyboardist who simply pummels out octave melodies can make listeners bored and desensitized.

Many of the tracks on my new trio album *Completely* feature sections of octave melodies played on both a Yamaha grand piano and a Nord Electro 3HP processed through a vintage Leslie 122 speaker. But regardless of which instrument I played, I employed both the octave melodies I love as well as a number of strategies to help color the space *between* each octave hit. These helped me use octaves in a way that felt flexible and nuanced, rather than violent and repetitive. Here are a few examples to help you vary the texture, movement, and overall vibe of your own octave melodies.

1. Simple Octaves

Ex. 1 starts off in *D* minor and shows a simple octave melody that stretches over four bars. This is similar to something I might play while soloing over my original tune "Problem With the Game," a modal jam with a heavy rock groove.

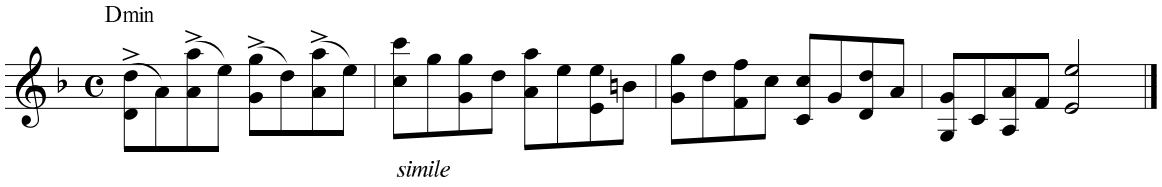
Ex. 1.



2. Adding Single Notes

Ex. 2 makes things more interesting by adding single notes between each octave hit. The emphasis should be on the octave itself, with the note after serving more as an echo than as a strong melodic statement of its own. In this example, the intermediary notes are mostly a perfect fifth up from the bottom note of the octave, an easy interval to play using the second or third finger—whichever feels more natural.

Ex. 2.



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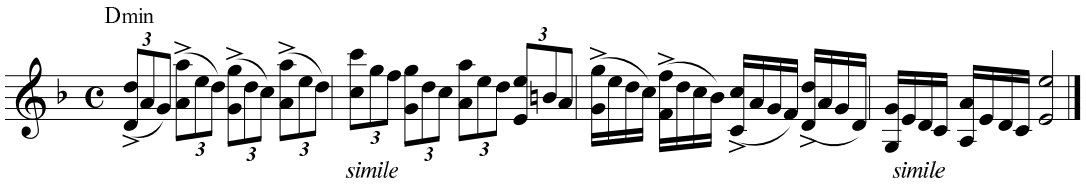
3. Adding Triplets and Sixteenth-Notes

Another strategy is to add triplet or sixteenth-note fall-offs after each octave hit, as shown in **Ex. 3**. Again, the emphasis falls on the initial octave with a smooth transition to the following two or three notes.

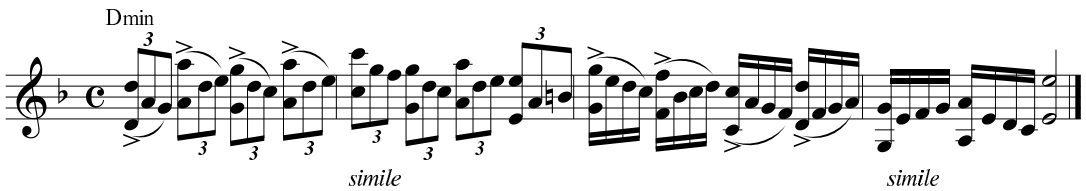
Ex. 3.



4. Adding Up and Down Runs

The real fun comes when you begin to mix up the directions of the "mini runs" in between octave hits, as in **Ex. 4**. Just like Ex. 3, the spaces between each quarter-note are filled with triplet or sixteenth-note sequences, but this time, some ascend while others descend. This adds yet another set of colors to your octave melody palette.

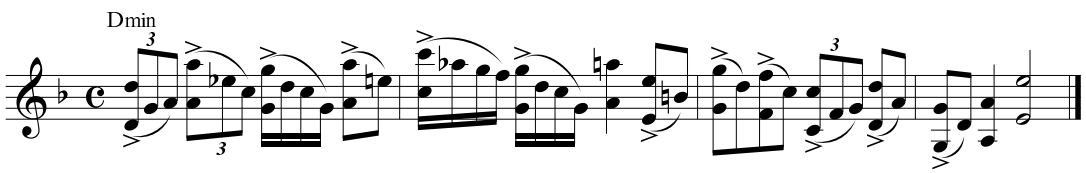
Ex. 4.



5. Putting it Together

Ex. 5 is how I might reinterpret the original octave melody, using tools from all the previous examples. Remember that the in-between notes sometimes stray from the mostly diatonic tonality in the rest of this lesson. Don't be afraid to experiment with altered fives, nines, and other chord tones when filling space between your chord melody notes. In my experience, the more "in" your octave melody itself is, the more fun it can be to play handfuls of "out" notes in between them, and vice versa.

Ex. 5.



LOGAN GRENDEL

Less Can Be More

"Playing melodies in octaves can be powerful when you're improvising. Just be mindful of how often you use them," says New York-based keyboardist and composer (and former Senior Editor at *Keyboard*) **Michael Gallant**. His new trio release, *Completely*, is out now. Learn more at gallantmusic.com.

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Play-along audio examples.

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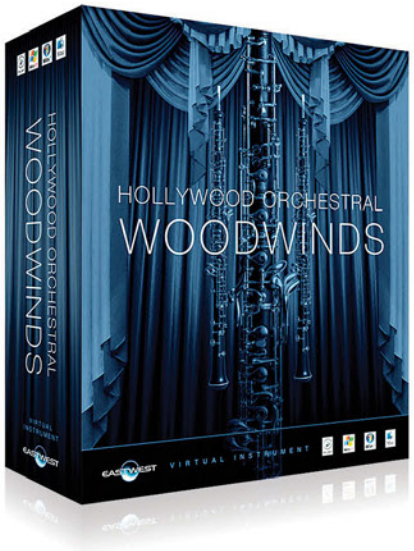

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Fig. 1. Modulation envelope depths of all three oscillators set to positive values in Novation V-Station.

Fig. 2. A similar envelope shape in Rob Papen Blue.

Fig. 3. Assigning the pitch envelope in the Korg Kronos' AL-1 synth to swoop up from below.

THE ART OF SYNTH SOLOING

Pitch Programming Potential

BY JERRY KOVARSKY

LET'S CONTINUE HAVING FUN WITH OSCILLATOR PITCH PROGRAMMING, WHICH we started last month. Using an envelope generator to shape some variations in pitch tuning can add interest to your lead sounds. Actually, we first explored this in the September 2012 issue, when discussing pitch sweeps of hard-synced oscillators. However, those techniques won't work well when the oscillators aren't synced, so let's explore a more general-purpose concept.

The Stab

This is the most common and classic technique, and it's used not only for leads, but many fast-attack poly synth sounds, brass emulations, and other more or less crisp textures. The basic idea is to program a quick swoop up or down into the main pitch, using an envelope generator. It doesn't need a complex envelope, just start and end points with a time or rate between the two.

Let's look at a possible shape. In **Figure 1**, the only parameter we're using is the decay stage of the ADSR envelope. In **Figure 2**, we're using a rate-and-level type of envelope, with attack set somewhat high, and a semi-fast decay time to a level of zero. Routed to modulate oscillator pitch, this envelope shape will cause a rapid glide. If the envelope is set to positive modulation, the pitch will start from a higher level determined by your modulation depth, and come down to unison at the speed determined by the decay stage. You'll want a rather quick return to unison so it sounds like a "sting" rather than discernible portamento, so adjust the decay time to taste. It also sounds fine coming up from below the pitch. To do this, set the envelope to a negative or inverted modulation.

The amount of pitch modulation is set on the pitch modulation page/parameter of your synth. Looking again at Figure 1, you can see that each oscillator has a dedicated "Mod Env" amount knob, and they're set to positive positions about two ticks north of "noon." This makes the pitch swoop down from above. Increasing that to four ticks would cause much deeper pitch modulation, and I might speed up the decay stage of the envelope to compensate. Also, though Figure 1 shows all oscillators being modulated, in most cases you'll want to modulate just one, leaving the others to give your notes a stable tonal center. **Figure 3** shows a sweep-from-below setup on a

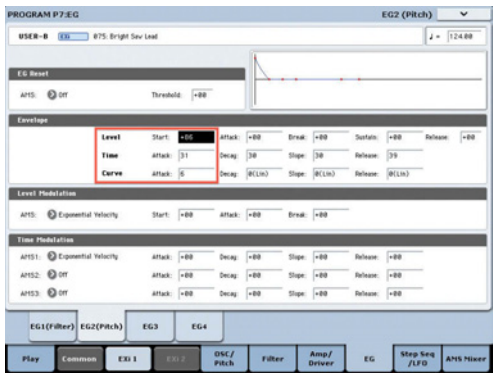

Fig. 4. Useful pitch envelope settings in AL-1.

Fig. 5. Velocity is modulating the depth of the envelope's effect on pitch in Spectrasonics Omnisphere.

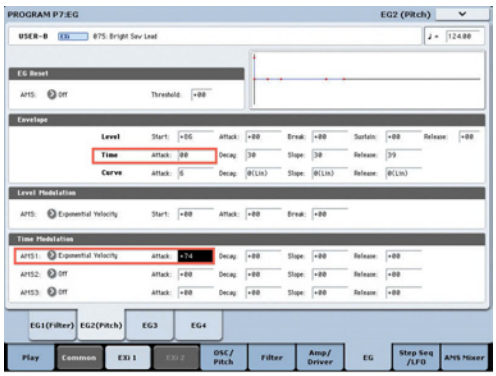

Fig. 6. Velocity set to increase (slow down) the pitch envelope attack—play harder to make the effect more pronounced.

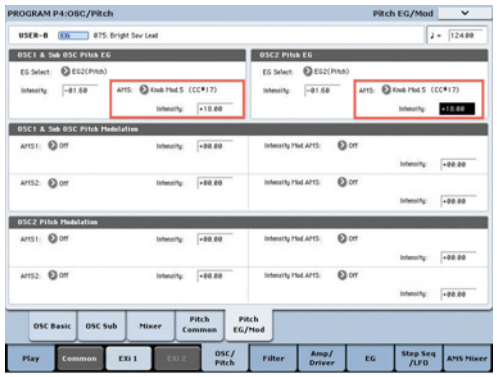

Fig. 7. Using a knob instead of velocity to do the same.

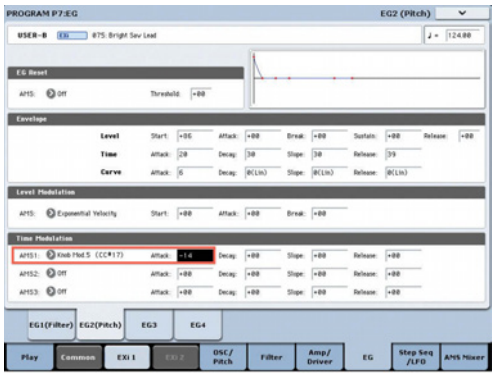

Fig. 8. The same knob reducing (speeding up) attack time as it increases pitch modulation depth.

pitch modulation page of the Korg Kronos' AL-1 virtual analog mode.

With a multi-step level and rate-based envelope, you can also affect the amount of pitch modulation based on the attack level (not the time). A low level produces a smaller "sting" no matter how deep the modulation is. I suggest a relatively high attack level as shown in **Figure 4**—you'll want some range for some of the concepts we'll be covering in a moment.

Dynamic Control

With the above basics you can add a nice pitch stab to your attack. But I'm all about control and expression, so let's add something more to this recipe. First, let's make the amount of pitch modulation dynamic; I like using velocity to bring in the effect. There are a number of ways to do this.

Modulate the modulation. If your pitch modulation amount can *itself* be modulated, we can do it as follows. On your pitch modulation page, or in your mod matrix, set the source to be your envelope, with a pitch mod amount of zero. Then set velocity (use exponential velocity if your synth has that option) to modulate the envelope amount/intensity. With a medium velocity bringing in the envelope depth, you should be able to play softly with no pitch stab. As you play harder, it introduces the envelope pitch modulation and increases the stab. **Figure 5** shows a setup that achieves this in Omnisphere's mod matrix.

Modulate the envelope. In **Figure 6**, we modulate the envelope attack time. First, set your envelope to modulate pitch with depth to your liking. Then go to the envelope page/parameters, and (in the case of my AL-1 example) lower the attack time to zero. Now go to the time modulation parameter, set its modulation source (referred to as AMS on Korg synths) to exponential velocity, and modulate the attack time with a positive value. When you play softly, the attack time is zero (instant) and you hear no effect. As you play harder, the attack time increases and you hear more of the pitch swoop.

Dial the Depth

For more control still, I like to dial the effect in and out at various depths. For this, I'm going to undo the previous velocity assignment and use a bipolar knob (noon equals zero, with negative values to the left and positive to the right) to modulate the envelope depth instead. Here, give yourself a lot of range. On your synth's pitch modulation page, set the intensity of the knob to a high value. In the Kronos' AL-1, I use +18, as in **Figure 7**. This produces a tasty amount during the beginning of the knob travel but goes over the top as I turn the knob further clockwise.

Here's a final trick: Set the same knob *also* to modulate the attack time. Using a negative value, you can speed up the attack time (lower the value) with the same knob twist that increases the depth. (See **Figure 8**.) These two changes offset one another, which has the effect of tapering the knob response—it's more dramatic in the beginning but gets subtler as you keep turning clockwise. Happy exploring! ♫

SOUNDCLOUD

Original audio examples.

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Fig. 1. 8Dio *1928 Legacy Steinway* piano offers both player and audience perspectives.

THE VIRTUAL ORCHESTRA

Piano and Harp

BY ROB SHROCK

PRACTICALLY ANY INSTRUMENT YOU CAN THINK OF CAN BE PUT INTO AN orchestral setting these days, especially in film, TV, and video game scores. However, there are a few auxiliary instruments commonly found in symphonic orchestras in addition to the brass, woodwind, string, and percussion families; such as piano, celeste, harpsichord, harmonium, and concert harp. Let's explore some important details of applying piano and harp in an orchestral context.

Piano

When there's a featured soloist, the grand piano is typically down front just below the conductor, giving it a full and present sound. The piano is sideways so that the open lid projects the sound to the audience. There's no pronounced high-to-low-note stereo panning as often heard in the "player's perspective" option found in most of today's software pianos. There's no rule that says you can't use this, and many players prefer it for solo, rock, or pop arrangements, but for an authentic orchestra concert sound, the side position is what you want.

Several piano libraries have sampled their pianos in multiple perspectives that include the side, including 8Dio *1928 Legacy Steinway* (see **Figure 1**), Imperfect Samples *Ebony Concert Grand* and *Steinway Concert Grand*, Synthogy Ivory II, and EastWest *Quantum Leap Pianos*.

If you have a piano library that you really love and it was only sampled from the player's perspective, you can still easily create the concert position. Simply narrow the pan width from stereo to near mono, and use a good reverb with a lot of early reflections to create a basic room ambiance—a convolution reverb like EastWest/Quantum Leap *Spaces* works great. A bit of high-pass and lowpass filtering with a gentle slope will help move the piano back into the orchestra a bit further if the original library was sampled with a large, up-close timbre.

When the piano is not a featured instrument, it usually sits further back in the orchestra near the percussion. Often, these are either smaller grands or upright pianos. A piano not as detailed as the "big guns" is often preferred, and again, you'd collapse it to near-mono.

Harp

To play a sampled concert harp properly, you must understand the instrument. To oversimplify, the harp is diatonic and can play a maximum of seven notes in a repeating scale that covers over six octaves. Tuned to a C♭ major scale at its base position, foot pedals move individual sets of notes up either a half step or a whole step. This often results in repeated notes on adjacent strings.

For instance, to create a glissando in *C* major up and down the strings, the *C*♭, *E*♭, and *G*♭ pedals would be moved up one position (a half-step) to create the needed *C* major triad. However, in a gliss all strings sound, so what about the other notes? You have no choice but to also move the *D*♭ and *A*♭ notes up a half-step, resulting in the second and sixth scale tones sounding. The *F*♭ stays in its original position, resulting in two sets of strings playing *E* natural in the *C* major chord. The only note

Fig. 2. Both articulation combos of VSL *Harp II* offer five different articulations that are switched with the mod wheel.

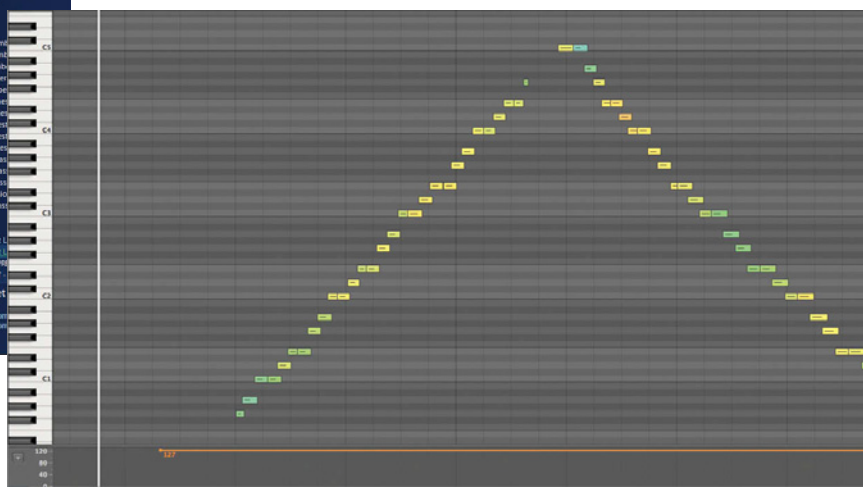


Fig. 3. In this simulated harp gliss, the notes have been adjusted to retain the seven-note diatonic nature. Notice the redundancy of *C* and *E*.

left is *B*♭, which can either go up a half-step (making the *C* chord a major seventh) or going up a whole-step to *B*♯, essentially doubling the root. These particular inevitabilities are what give the harp its sound and color.

Several harp libraries, like VSL *Harps* (see **Figure 2**), Sonivox *Symphonic Harp*, and Cinesamples *CineHarp* give you quite a variety of glisses in various keys and tempos that will blend with the individual notes samples. But what happens when those prerecorded glisses don't work for your piece?

To sound authentic, you can't just play any chromatic jazz harmony you like and then run your hands up and down the white keys for a gliss. Authentic harp parts are tricky, but one thing you can do to better simulate a gliss is to ignore the key you're in and record the MIDI using just the

white notes; this will give you a seven-note gliss. Then select all notes of a certain pitch in each octave and edit them based on how a harp functions. In our example, you end up with each *E* and *C* notes being played twice with no *F* or *B* in the scale, which is pretty much what a real harp scale would sound like (see **Figure 3** on page 39).

However, no harp is ever perfectly in tune, so the double-strike of two identical notes may sound too sterile. One quick fix is to duplicate your MIDI track and instrument, then separate the duplicated notes from the main notes. Using sample transposition in your DAW (transposing the MIDI notes up a step and the instrument down a step, for instance) for one of the harps will result in different samples playing those redundant pitches, which will sound much more realistic from the slight chorusing that happens between different strings playing the same pitch.

General Advice

Everyone has their own way of doing things, and I'd like to share a little of my process. Knowing ahead of time what I want to accomplish is half the battle. The other half is trial and error.

I often sit down at a piano with blank manuscript paper or notation software and begin the orchestration by just writing down the notes for various parts as I hear them in my head. The advantage to this approach when using orchestral samples is simple: I write what I truly think is best for the musical arrangement as a right-brain creative effort, with little thought at the time given to the actual execution. I then realize that particular orchestration as best I can with my various sample libraries, largely as a left-brain craft exercise in DAW sequencing. In other words, it's much easier to make myself go to the trouble of changing specific articulations, patches, controllers, and so on, when the written score is "forcing" me.

In the old days, composers and orchestrators had no choice but to work this way, and it is obviously a proven approach. Manuscript paper is still your friend, and it helps you "see" the orchestration in a particular way that's valuable to the process.

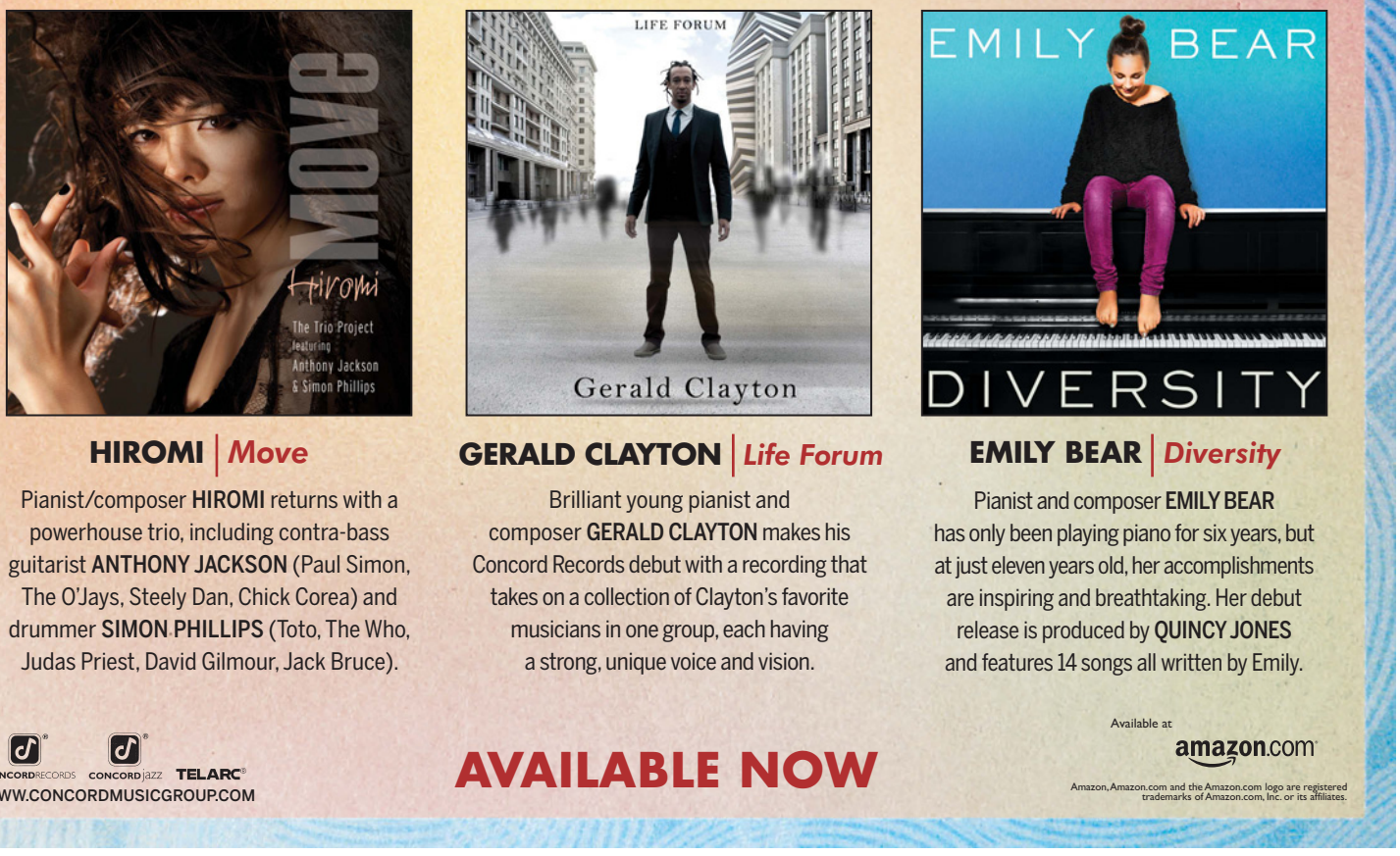
However, we now have the ability to pull up a sophisticated sound and just jam on it until we like what we hear, which was something our musical forebears couldn't do. So, why not try that?

As much as I hate scrolling through hundreds of synth patches as the sole approach to searching for inspiration or a musical idea, there's something to be said for loading up a good variety of orchestral articulations and giving yourself some time to improv along with the track or a guide. In my experience, most of it will be junk; however, something usually happens that completely opens up my mind's approach to using something in the score that I might not have otherwise imagined. It could be exploring a less common articulation or just stumbling upon a melodic fragment inspired by the sound. This is the trial and error aspect, and it's usually a relatively small investment in time compared to the reward. Just don't forget to hit the Record button! ♫

SOUNDCLOUD

Audio examples of these instruments and techniques.

keyboardmag.com/may2013



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Scratch That Itch

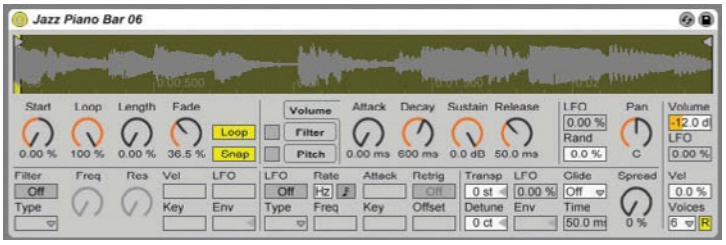
SAMPLE SCRUBBING WITH SIMPLER

BY FRANCIS PRÈVE

OVER THE PAST FEW MONTHS, THERE HAVE BEEN SOME REALLY INNOVATIVE iOS sampling apps that let you "scratch" your samples—notably Marcos Alonso's Samplr. While this sound isn't exactly like scratching a record, it's an extremely cool effect that's ripe for folding into club tracks, regardless of your genre du jour. This trick can be done with any sampler that allows MIDI control of sample loop positions, but Ableton's Simpler does it with remarkable ease and, er, simplicity, so we'll be using that to demonstrate this technique.

Step 1

Begin by selecting a scratch-friendly sample. Short riffs and vocal snippets work extremely well, so I used a jazz piano sample from Apple GarageBand.

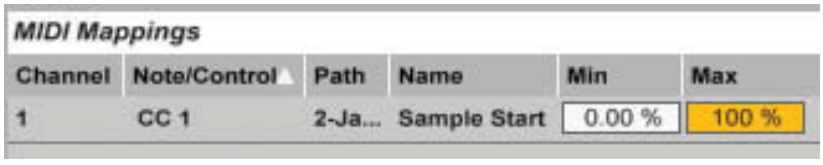


Step 2

Once you've loaded your sample, turn looping on and create an extremely short loop. From there, experiment with the sample—and try toggling the "Snap" parameter on and off. Snap forces the loop to use zero-crossing points for a somewhat smoother sound, but whether that works with your sample is a subjective assessment. Tinkering with the loop's crossfade (Fade) parameter will smooth things out further. Once the loop is set, playing a key will generate a tone based on the pitch of the first note of your sample.

Step 3

Now, while holding down a key, adjust the Start parameter, sweeping the loop position forward and backward through your sample. If you've set everything up correctly, you should hear the sample "scrubbing" forward and backward, much like vinyl record scratching techniques.



Step 4

Finally, using Ableton Live's MIDI mapping functions, assign the modulation wheel (or if you're ambitious, aftertouch) to the sample start parameter. *Voila!* As you play your riff, you can scrub your sample forward and backward with the mod wheel, resulting in some really slick effects that are primed for maximum dance floor impact.

SOUNDCLOUD

Step-by-step audio examples.

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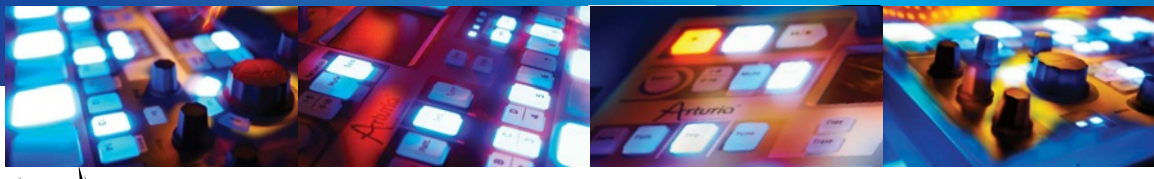

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Affordable Acoustic Pianos

BY ROB SHROCK

IF YOU'RE IN THE MARKET FOR A NEW PIANO AND WANT TO KEEP YOUR expenditure comfortably in the realm of four figures, you're most likely looking at uprights, also called vertical pianos. In addition to the lower costs of overseas manufacturing, the piano industry has seen dramatic improvements in build quality over the past 20 years. The used market can offer great deals, but can be like the Wild West if you're new to piano shopping. The warranty and service that come with buying new from a reputable dealer are made more appealing by the fact that these days, you get more piano for your money than ever.

Hands On

At this year's Winter NAMM show, I checked out a number of pianos priced under $10,000, with an emphasis at the $5,000 price point or even less. As is common when auditioning any budget acoustic instrument, what I was able to play ranged from "pretty bad" to "amazing for the price." The pianos in this roundup represent the most memorable of what I found there. The Yamaha pianos (see page 50) were reviewed by *Keyboard* Editor Stephen Fortner.

From talking to the various manufacturer reps, it became clear how important the preparation phase before delivery to the customer is for both the playing condition of the instrument and how that affects final pricing. As a matter of course, most high-end pianos are prepared by the distributor to ensure consistent tone, feel, and operation. However, not all budget pianos get this treatment before delivery, as it usually affects the cost to the buyer.

The result is that overseas pianos prepped after they arrive in the United States sound much better in the dealer's showroom, and that experience makes all the difference for a prospective buyer testing budget-priced instruments. The improvement is not just noticeable, but really a world of difference. This aspect muddies the waters a bit for someone trying to make a buying decision, because a really decent piano might not be presenting itself in a way that reflects its true potential and value if it hasn't been prepped.

So what can you do? Search out a piano that feels and sounds good to you right now, and leave it at that. If a distributor or showroom has gone to the trouble to prep their budget pianos upon arrival, then that's probably a good sign that they care about the process and are more worthy of your business. It's not your problem if a sleeper piano is getting overlooked because it doesn't sound good on the showroom floor. Move on, because it's too difficult to guess to what degree tweaking and adjustment will improve a budget piano.

Baldwin

Baldwin pianos are now built in China, and Gibson has owned the brand since 2001. The most affordable model, the BJ120 (so named because it's 120 centimeters tall), carries a manufacturer's suggested retail price of $7,985. However, we're told it can be found for much less at dealers. The piano I played had a gorgeous black gloss finish that would look beautiful in either a modern or vintage decorated room.

The BJ-120 features Baldwin's new "Stealth Action," designed to greatly minimize the mechanical noises typically found in vertical pianos and available in many Baldwin uprights of 43", 45", or 48" heights. The action was firm and the tone slightly bright on the top end. Although the bottom end of the unit I played was unfocused due to some tuning issues, it sounded balanced for this instrument—as far as I could tell in the noisy NAMM environment that drains the the bass out of everything.

Hardman

Until this last year pianos bearing the name of "Hardman, Peck, & Co." were built in China by Dongbei, an established manufacturer. This past year, Hardman began manufacturing their pianos through Beijing Hsinghai Piano Group. The vast majority of these pianos found in the U.S. are branded as Hardman; however, if you come across a Hsinghai, they're virtually identical to the corresponding Hardman models. I tried several Hardmans and one Hsinghai. I was told that the ones I played would all sell under $5,000 street price.

By coincidence, the Hsinghai was my least favorite, with a thin, nasal tone and spongy action. The 46" Hardman Chippendale fared noticeably better in overall tone and playability, but didn't cross a threshold where I'd recommend it as a good investment. Surprisingly, the 44" Concert Console sounded best of all the Hardman uprights on the floor. I suspect it had seen a little prep work, as the action, response, and tuning were in good shape and the mechanical noises were minimal. Slightly opening the lid on this piano really helped open up the tone at the player position, but there was still an unnatural midrange coupled with a dull top end and lackluster bottom.

The finishes were nice on all three, with mostly glossy dark wood treatments. I liked the adjustable benches that were provided for these pianos. Overall, I found the Hardman tone a bit lacking for serious players and think these would be better suited for young students practicing at home in a small room.

Perzina

By far, the standout upright piano I played at NAMM was the Perzina Vertical. According to the spec sheet I was given, the model number was GP-129BBZ; however, the picture on the sheet and those I've seen online don't match up exactly with the floor model I played. Most notably, the music desk design was quite different.

The Perzina is available in 48" and 52" models (I played the larger), making it one of the largest new vertical pianos available. Those extra inches really matter; the tone is generally big and rich on the bottom and sparkly clear on the top. The midrange is even, for the most part, with the weakest spot being the octave or so below middle *C*.

This piano sounds fantastic, and I would not hesitate to have one in the studio. The floor model had the bottom panel removed, which is one of two spots where I'd point a mic for recording—the other being the back. Opening the lid further opened the tone, and even in as unforgiving and noisy an environment as the NAMM show, it was easy to tell that this piano was all about tone. One reason for this is a signature Perzina feature, a soundboard that "floats" as opposed to being glued in all the way around.

Although manufactured in China for labor cost reasons, over 90 percent of Perzina components are European, as is the design. This is really a case where the best of both worlds (European design meets cheap labor) makes for a lot of piano in the hands of the buyer. Although the on-paper price is upwards of $9,000, I was assured by the rep that these pianos can be had for much less. According to that same rep, all Perzina pianos get a round of preparation treatment once they enter the U.S.

Yamaha

Yamaha acoustic pianos are known for their high build quality and sonic consistency: Given baseline maintenance and tuning, any specimen of a given model anywhere in the world is going to sound and play like any other. You know what you're getting—and in the case of time-tested products like the C series grands and U series uprights, what you're getting is world class.

Two models I tried (first at NAMM, then more extensively at Oakland, California's Piedmont Piano Company) brought a lot of what we like about Yamaha to far below our real-world ceiling price. The B1, a new model introduced last September, is Yamaha's most affordable acoustic. At 43" high, it's only about three inches taller (and a like amount deeper) than the NU1 reviewed on page 50. The crisp angles of its cabinetry give it a decidedly modern look that's still understated enough to fit in with any décor.

The B1 gave a clean and clear presentation of tone across the keyboard, with a of "singing" sustain in the range around middle C that I found surprising given the piano's compact size. Yamaha tweaked the individual key weights on the B1 to create an even response across the keyboard—a curious sort of opposite of how digital pianos employ graded actions. The action is on the light

GRAND ASPIRATIONS

RONNIE ROSENBERG

You can find a diamond in the rough on the used market, perhaps even getting a grand on an upright budget, but be forearmed with some knowledge. Robert Friedman has been a professional trader of used pianos (particularly Steinway) for over 40 years. His experience has helped thousands of piano buyers make sound investments, and here's his sage advice. He can be reached at virtuosopiano.com.

- **Steals and Deals:** Mason & Hamlin, Yamaha, and Baldwin. Their five- to six-foot grands can retail for up to $35,000, yet if you shop around you can find older ones that are hardly played for $5,000 or less.
- **Tale of the Tuning:** Insist on seeing a record of the last tuning. If the piano is out of tune after a recent tuning, the pinblock (which holds and stabilizes the tuning pegs) might be dried out. On the other hand, it's a good sign if it's in tune but hasn't been touched for two years or more.
- **One Owner ≠ Better:** Whoever bought the piano new at retail suffered the most front-end depreciation. In my experience, an original owner will most likely ask a significantly higher price than a second or third owner.
- **It's the Miles, Not the Year:** Ask the seller how many people played the piano for how many hours per week. If it's been overused, moving parts may need replacement soon.
- **Let It Be:** Once you take the piano home, the wooden parts (including the pinblock) will need at two weeks to acclimate to temperature, humidity, and barometric differences from the previous location. Only then should you spend money on tuning, regulation, or other tweaking. **Jon Regen**

side overall, and the response to varied playing dynamics was forgiving—almost as if there was slight compression on the sound to ensure that if a beginner's finger comes down too softly or too hard on the next note, you'll hear neither unintentional silence nor a loud clunker.

As is the case with any piano this compact, the lowest couple of octaves have enough bass for hearing the correct notes but not necessarily for their full emotional impact to come across—an analogy would be listening to music on a pair of audiophile bookshelf speakers, but without a subwoofer. Moving over to the T118 model, a 47" tall upright with a slightly larger footprint, I heard a lot more of the fundamental frequencies in the bass notes, with sustain and fullness around middle *C* benefitting from the larger soundboard. The T118 action is a bit heavier as well, in a way that many teachers might consider more suitable for traditional practice. Still, something about the B1 kept me coming back—call it an overall tonal cohesion and beginner-friendly vibe.

Yamaha told me that the T118 will soon be replaced by two taller B models, the B2 and B3—making clearance deals on a T118 more likely. (Note that the B1's concession to low cost and size is a laminate soundboard; all other models mentioned here use spruce.) While street prices of acoustic pianos are more dealer-driven and thus vary more than synths and pro audio gear, our research says you should be able to score a T118 under $5,000 and a B1 for less than $4,000—including sales tax in both cases. —STEPHEN FORTNER

Yamaha B1

Yamaha T118

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Keyboard K KEYBUY AWARD

YAMAHA NU1

BY STEPHEN FORTNER

"PEOPLE COME IN HERE LOOKING FOR AN ACOUSTIC UPRIGHT THEY CAN afford, but often leave with this thing." So said more than one piano dealer we spoke to when doing research for this issue. "This thing" is the NU1, the latest Yamaha piano to take the hybrid concept introduced in the AvantGrand and aim it squarely at your living room. "Hybrid" refers mainly to two ideas: a real piano action married to a sophisticated sample playback engine, and designing the speakers and cabinetry as a whole in order to project sound more like a real piano would. Having reviewed the five-figure AvantGrand N3 in August 2010, I was curious to see how a piano as compact and relatively affordable as the NU1 stacked up. To make a long story short, it exceeded my expectations on nearly every level.

Keyboard Feel

The finger-to-music connection of the action is superb, responding quickly and accurately to all levels of dynamics, barely-there grace notes, soft legato playing, machine-gun note repetition, you name it. The sense that key strikes are causing real hammers to hit real strings is uncanny. There are three velocity curves (plus fixed velocity), and I got a lot of mileage out of practicing on the heaviest curve but switching to medium when playing in front of people. Also, anyone with kids or cats will appreciate the anti-slam fallboard which closes softly even if dropped.

Internal Speakers

The stereo sound system (40 watts per side) places the woofers firing at your knees while the tweeters fire forward just under the piano top. I played a number of acoustic uprights while editing this issue's roundup (see page 44), and can attest that on the NU1 there's almost no sense that you're hearing *speakers* at all—the sound seems to issue from an organic acoustic space that, like Doctor Who's police box, is bigger inside than out.

The sound doesn't become brittle at maximum volume and velocity, and gets more than loud enough to be heard above a houseful of party guests on their third tiki drink—and I make strong ones. Bass response was on par with what I'd expect from a full-height acoustic upright like a Yamaha U3 or even a baby grand. Still, there's a *lot* more concert grand thunder sampled in than what the internal speakers reveal, as I learned from running the piano's 1/4" line outs into a P.A. system that included subwoofers (see **Figure 1**).

Piano Sound

The NU1 is the first Yamaha product to use samples of their new flagship concert grand, the CFX. (AvantGrand models sampled the CFX's recent forbear, the CFIIIS.) Playing the NU1 and AvantGrand N3 side by side, the N3 did sound bigger owing to its having more speakers, channels, and power, but somehow the NU1 sounded *sweeter*, with a clear, singing sustain in the two acoustic piano variants. The second of these was subtly brighter and more pop-oriented, while the first was superior for legato playing. I could hear no velocity layer breaks, sample loops, bad interaction between samples, or other digital telltales. I also had two opportunities to do direct comparison with a nine-foot

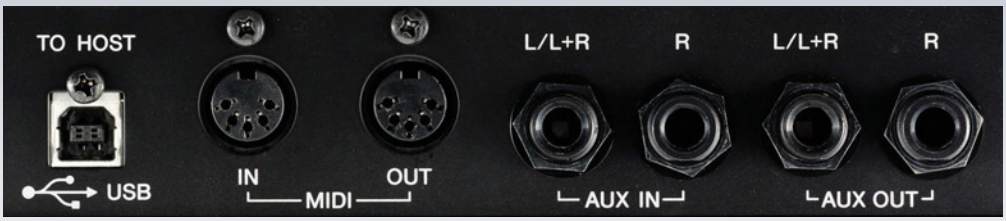


Fig. 1. The 1/4" inputs let you play a second keyboard through the NU1's internal speakers. Line outs are on hand for recording or an extrernal P.A.

Fig. 2. This barely-there panel is really the only visible reminder that the NU1 is an electronic instrument.

CFX, and the samples are very true to the original.

Soundlessly holding some keys while striking staccato chords on others revealed accurate sympathetic resonance; damper resonance, sustain samples, and release samples are on hand as well. Again, the illusion that there's an acoustic environment inside the piano and that frequencies are blending "in the air" as opposed to "in the wires" is very convincing. In fact, musicians who tried the NU1 at my home over the past few months usually had to be shown the stealthy little control panel to realize it was electronic.

The polyphony spec is 256 voices, and my best efforts at hitting this ceiling and hearing notes cut off went unrewarded.

Other Sounds and Features

Two electric pianos cover a DX7 homage and a chorused Rhodes. The Rhodes is authentic and fun to play, but it's a bit "safe"—I'd like to hear a little more attitude when I dig in. There's a lovely harpsichord with pronounced key-off sounds, but that's it—no organ, strings, vibraphone, XG bank, or other sounds that often flesh out home digital pianos. Frankly, the CFX piano sound is so good that I didn't miss them.

Ancillary features are likewise piano-centric. The metronome can accent the downbeat every two to six beats for different time signatures. Seven temperaments (equal, mean, Pythagorean, etc.) let you play historical tunings. Adjustable "Intelligent Acoustic" loudness compensation boosts the bass at low volumes. An onboard song recorder can play and record single-track MIDI or stereo audio files—the latter if you plug in a USB memory stick. Preloaded MIDI songs include 50 classical essentials with an included songbook, and being able to slow these down and play along removes a major intimidation factor for beginners. You access all such functions, as well as transposition, by holding down one of the buttons on the left end block and striking a key (see **Figure 2**); a handy cheat sheet is on page 35 of the manual.

Given the dual headphone jacks, I was surprised not to find a "duet mode" that lets a learner and teacher sit side by side and play notes in the same range. Many less expensive digital pianos have this. Also, a light source placed too close to the keys can interfere with some of the NU1's optical sensors, making the odd key intermittently fail to sound. Slightly adjusting the angle of my lamp was all it ever took to correct this, and I'd recommend not placing the NU1 in direct sunlight.

Conclusions

The two biggest benefits of a digital alternative to the acoustic piano are well known: It never needs tuning and you can turn the volume way down. Yamaha's AvantGrand line sounded so good and removed the associated compromises to such an extent that we called it the virtual piano for people who can't stand virtual pianos. The NU1 brings the same cost-benefit balance to a far lower price, amounting to a new benchmark for families, educators, and musicians in search of a pure piano substitute.

As a tech enthusiast who gravitates towards knobs, LEDs, and menus, I also found that a free-standing piano can be a family and social hub in a way that a button-covered slab on an X-stand doesn't duplicate. When I needed to work, I headed for the stacks of synths in my studio. When I wanted to *play*, I sat at the NU1, and when friends came over, the NU1 was what we gathered around. It can really become the hearth of a house, and *that* is my strongest recommendation. ♫

Snap Judgment

PROS Gorgeous acoustic piano sounds sampled from Yamaha CFX concert grand. Sense of acoustic realism, as opposed to sound coming through speakers, is simply striking. Solid construction and beautiful finish.

CONS Optical key sensors can be affected by a light source too close to the keys. No duet mode. Limited non-piano sounds.

Bottom Line

The new gold standard in a self-contained but compact acoustic piano replacement.

$5,995 list | $4,995 and under, street | yamaha.com

Read our review of the AvantGrand N3, which contains much of the same technology as the NU1.

keyboardmag.com/may2013

UNIVERSAL AUDIO Apollo

BY STEPHEN FORTNER

Keyboard K KEYBUY AWARD

"WHAT'S THE ONE THING OUR UAD SYSTEM DOESN'T DO . . . YET?" UNIVERSAL Audio's Amanda Whiting quizzed me some weeks before the Apollo was first announced. I first wondered if maybe they were adding soft synths to their stable of DSP-powered plug-ins, but that wasn't it. Once she was satisfied I was stumped, she affected a perfect Mona Lisa smile and said, "Tracking." As in, front end recording. My next thought was that if anyone could be an exception to the rule that the universe doesn't need more audio interfaces, it'd be Universal Audio. After living with the Apollo for the better part of a year, that once-cautious optimism has been rewarded on so many levels that my own smile when I use it is less Mona Lisa and more Cheshire Cat: ear to ear and the only thing you can see.

Overview

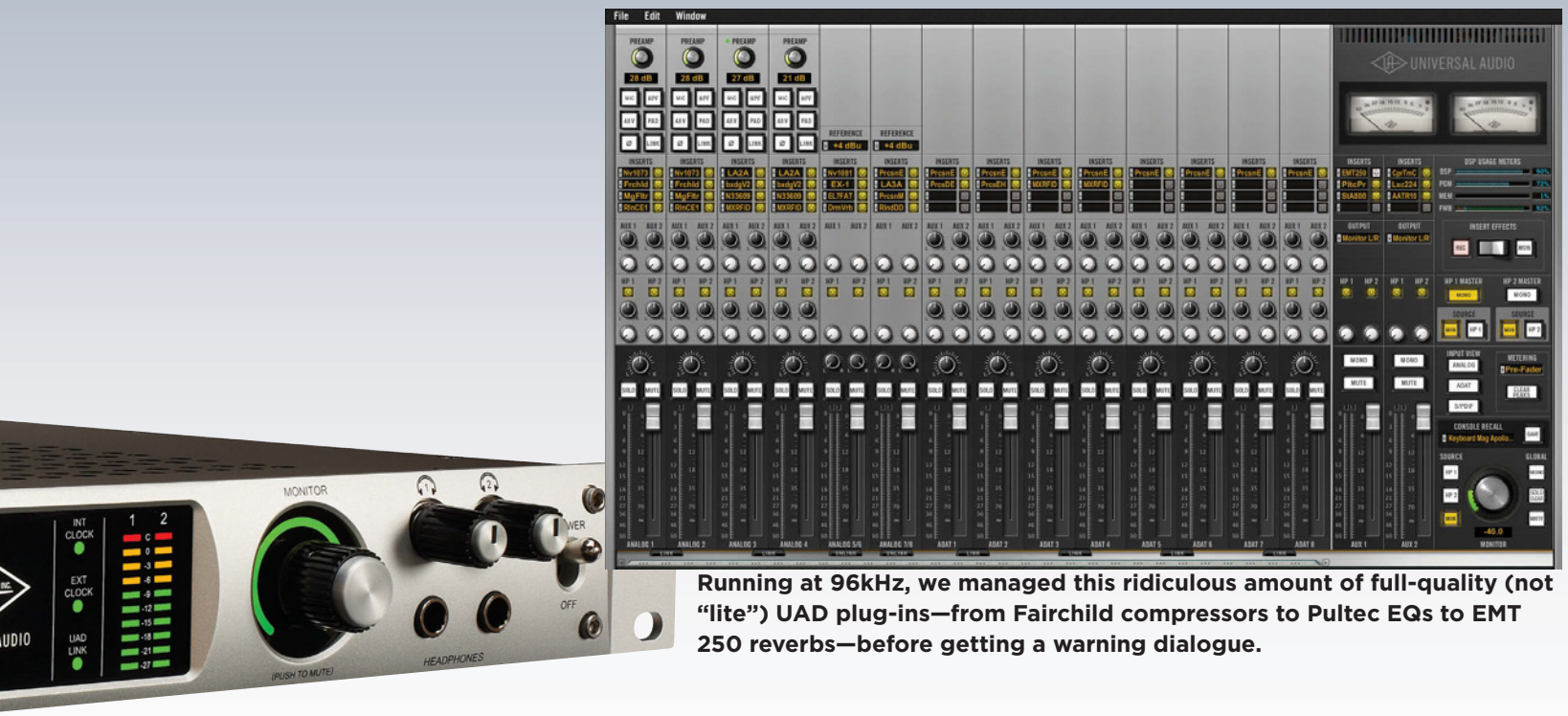
The Apollo combines a two- or four-chip UAD-2 system—which runs audio effects and processing on dedicated DSP hardware, freeing up your computer's CPU—with a full-featured audio interface. Only this audio interface sounds so good that you'd have to step up to dedicated converters from the likes of Prism or Apogee to get appreciably better. Most compellingly, the Apollo lets you do something you can't do with a card-based UAD-2 system: Treat the UAD plug-ins as "hardware" upstream of your "tape machine"—the signal can pass through them before it arrives at your DAW and you can print the results to your audio tracks.

The Apollo connects to your Mac or PC via FireWire 800 or Thunderbolt, the latter of which is now well established on current model Macs (except for the Mac Pro, grrr . . .) but still somewhat nascent in the PC realm. Thunderbolt promises far greater speed and bandwidth, and enables two Apollos to act as one. That said, throughout this review, I connected to my Mac Pro (first-gen quad core) and a 13" MacBook Pro via FireWire 800 and had a largely great experience.

We don't have the space to review or even list UAD plug-ins in here, but they're at least half of what makes the Apollo so desirable. Briefly, they fit into two categories: Spot-on emulations of coveted classics of analog recording gear (Teletronix limiters, Pultec EQs, Neve console circuits . . . the list goes on), and things that aren't emulative but no less great sounding and useful (DreamVerb, for example). For sheer variety and sonic excellence, Waves is the only real competitor, but since we're talking DSP-powered plug-ins that don't drain your CPU, their TDM versions running on Pro Tools HD would be the fair comparison—and that's a whole other price league.

Hardware

The faceplate and controls of the Apollo ooze quality in terms of both look and feel. A detented, endless Preamp knob controls a digitally stabilized analog gain stage on inputs 1 through 4, which can take mic or line level. Pressing this



Running at 96kHz, we managed this ridiculous amount of full-quality (not "lite") UAD plug-ins—from Fairchild compressors to Pultec EQs to EMT 250 reverbs—before getting a warning dialogue.

knob in steps through the input channels, and a green LED collar around the knob shows its position on the current channel; the continuous, no-segments look of this is a nice touch.

Phantom power is switchable independently per channel, as is a low cut, 20dB pad, stereo linking, and phase reverse (though you can't reverse just one side of a linked pair). Since these channels have separate XLR and 1/4" jacks instead of the now-usual combo jacks on the rear panel, the mic/line switch can function as a source switcher—you won't need to unplug a synth to plug in a mic. Likewise, plugging a cable into either Hi-Z input on the front takes over channel 1 or 2 and switches to guitar-appropriate impedance, which can also provide a nice boost for recording an old passive Rhodes.

The Preamp knob doesn't tweak the gain on inputs 5 through 8, which are line level only but can be independently switched between -10dB and +4dB in the included Console software (see below). But in a keyboard-based studio, we'd marry synths (or patch bay jacks for synths) to those inputs, and synths famously have widely divergent output levels at maximum volume. I know almost no audio interfaces do this, but given the Apollo's premium positioning, it'd be nice if the Preamp knob were a one-stop shop for trimming *all* your signals as you set up your session.

The monitor output knob is the best studio volume control I've ever had, moving both stereo channels in smooth and predictable lock step (I can't say the same for my Mackie Big Knob or TC Level Pilot). Next to it, two headphone outputs can each have their own mixes, and stay clean while getting plenty loud—though not as loud, I found, if you happen to like higher-end headphones that have 600-ohm impedance.

Console Software

For starters, the Console controls all the Apollo's hardware functions and lets you get at a few things you can't do from the front panel, including stereo linking for analog ins 5 through 8 and the digital ins. It looks and acts like an analog mixer, with faders, aux sends, headphone mix sends, and up to four plug-in insert points for every hardware input on the machine.

You can use the Apollo in your DAW with or without the Console. Without, the system works in your DAW as though it were a separate audio interface and UAD-2 Satellite. Using Console concurrently is where the real power lies, though.

It's a heck of a cue mixer, letting you and your session-mates monitor your takes through UAD effects with no latency and independently of any native effects in your project. This is great if a singer needs a bit of reverb to feel the vibe. Apollo does this so well, in fact, that I wish it could do about eight headphone mixes, but you get two. If you have more headphone amplifiers, you could task the aux returns as two more headphone mixes, because you can assign the hardware output pair for each aux right on the Console.

So, how about that tracking through plug-ins? Flip the big honkin' Insert Effects switch from "Mon" to "Rec," and presto—you now have the world's sexiest virtual effects rack with its own "sidecar" mixer upstream of your DAW. How do you route a console channel to an audio track? Simple: In the input area for that track or its DAW mixer channel, select the Apollo hardware input that corresponds to the Console channel on which you've put the UAD plug-ins you want. Since each Console channel is locked to a physical input on the Apollo (or pair of them if stereo linked), this makes perfect sense. Adding to the flexibility, Console *output* busses—both aux returns, both headphone mixes, and the main monitor out—also show up as input choices in your DAW.

Snap Judgment

PROS Clean, detailed, musical, versatile mic preamps. Converter quality approaches dedicated high-end units. Excellent UAD "powered plug-ins" run on dedicated DSP. Lets you monitor or track through plug-ins before hitting your DAW, as though they were hardware. Very high build quality.

CONS No MIDI learn or hardware control surface support for Console software at this time. No MIDI I/O. Can lose connection upon computer waking from sleep.

Eight analog inputs enjoy separate mic and line inputs for the first four channels. Lightpipe inputs support S/MUX for sample rates above 48kHz, and the Console software can do realtime sample rate conversion on an incoming S/PDIF signal.

Though you can use the Apollo's plug-ins directly in your DAW, you do need to host them in the Console to track through them. Once you've set things up, though, you can actually quit the Console and still record, thanks to the Console Recall plug-in. Put this in any insert slot in your project (where it goes doesn't matter and won't hurt anything, but your master bus is a convenient place), and it applies the most recently saved Console configuration (or any you then load from a menu in the Recall window) to your project, with all the plug-ins affecting their corresponding hardware inputs. This is seriously slick.

Also slick: If two Apollos are daisy chained to your computer via Thunderbolt, the Console sees them as one big interface, displaying all the channels accordingly. Not so slick: There's currently no hardware control surface support, nor even a way to MIDI-learn onscreen controllers. Given where the project studio and personal computers are headed, though, I might vote for multi-touch screen support first.

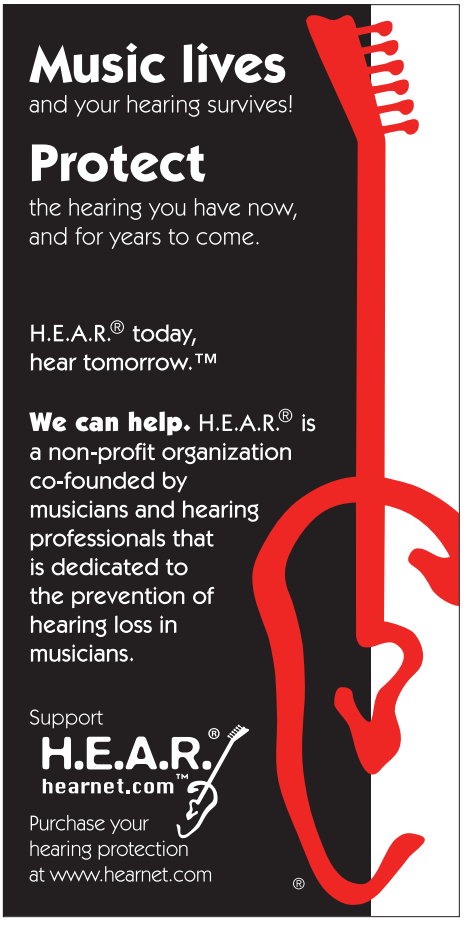
In Use

On a scale from 1 to 10 where 1 is the most "character"-saturated tube mic preamp imaginable and 10 is a "wire with gain," I'd rank the Apollo's preamps as a 7 to 8. I tried them with a variety of source/mic combinations, ranging from a Blue Bottle on male and female vocals to a pair of AKG C-451EBs on acoustic 12-string guitar to an Audix D6 on kick drum to Marshall MXL-41s and an A-T 4050 on grand piano. In all cases, they were transparent and detailed without being clinical. I could hear the "air" around a vocal or the transient of a guitar pick first hitting the string, yet there was enough body and attitude that getting gutsy kick, tom, and Leslie sounds was just a matter of choosing the right mic—at no time did I feel like the pres were fighting me.

When I tried different mics on the same source, even subtle differences between mics jumped out at me. The Apollo's reserve of clean gain even gave my beat-up petri dish of a Shure SM58 a new lease on life. While I didn't measure the noise floor, it was never an audible problem even on quiet sources that required lots of gain.

One of my studio secret weapons is sort of a cult thing: a four-channel Sytek MPX-4A preamp modified with Burr-Brown op amps to improve its transient response. It's not that the Apollo pres sound *like* the Sytek, but they sound more like it than they do anything else I've worked with. In terms of overall audio quality, I'll go out on a limb and say that to get better mic preamps in an integrated audio interface, you'd have to spend considerably more on something like a Prism Sound Orpheus.

Using the Apollo as a simple output device to play virtual instruments at 44.1kHz, I did



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notice a bit more latency than I'm used to from my workhorse setup, a MOTU PCIe-424 card with HD192 and 2408 Mk.3 interfaces. I could make the latency go away, but doing so usually meant going down a buffer setting compared to the MOTU rig—128 as opposed to 256 samples if playing an attack-forward sound like piano into a project that already contained several other virtual instrument tracks. However, the Apollo having its own DSP for *audio* plug-ins you need means you *can* run lower buffers without nearly as much fear of glitching. You can also more confidently step up the sample rate to 96 or even 192kHz—at 96kHz, latency became almost a non-issue. I was unable to test latency using Thunderbolt as I have yet to acquire a Thunderbolt-equipped computer, but expect improvement and hope to report on this after this review hits our website.

Since getting the Apollo, I've fallen into the way of working it suggests: Let it handle all the EQ, dynamics, and other audio effects, so that my computer's CPU can run more virtual instruments. How many of those audio plug-ins could I run at once? The screen shot on page 53 is of an endurance test done at 96kHz, right before adding one more EMT 250 plate reverb made the session say "uncle." I actually maxed out the FireWire bus before hitting the ceiling of my quad-chip review unit's DSP, and again, I'm hoping to report better results when I go Thunderbolt. But still, the decadent display of power I did manage should offer peace of mind that on virtually any real musical project where you allocate plug-ins in logical ways, you're unlikely to run out of gas—especially with a quad unit.

A known issue on Macs is that if the computer goes to sleep, it can and probably will lose contact with the Apollo upon waking. Sometimes quitting and restarting the Console and my DAW fixed this, sometimes I needed to reboot the computer. Also, it's a best practice to turn on the Apollo, then the computer to ensure solid communication.

Conclusions

The Apollo's I/O complement and price clearly aim it at the producer, composer, or project studio owner who must deliver professional results on tight deadlines, and its single rack size and onboard DSP is a must if you do that while traveling with a laptop. If you're writing tunes entirely inside the box using virtual instruments, it may well be overkill—luxurious, envy-inducing overkill—and adding a UAD-2 card or Satellite to your existing setup may instead be the way to go if you're jonesing for plug-in power. If you do any amount of recording vocals or external instruments, though, and your mixes are processing-intensive, there's no other single box out there—at any price—that can boast the Apollo's integration of mic preamp and converter quality above its class, massive CPU relief, and what may be the hippest plug-in ecosystem on the planet. That makes it a clear Key Buy winner in our book. ♫

Bottom Line

A beautifully executed integration of audio interface and DSP accelerator. For what it does and how it sounds, it's amazing it's not twice the price.

Apollo Duo:
$2,499 list | $1,999 street
Apollo Quad:
$2,999 list | $2,499 street
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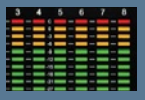

Up close with the latest Apollo features and updates.

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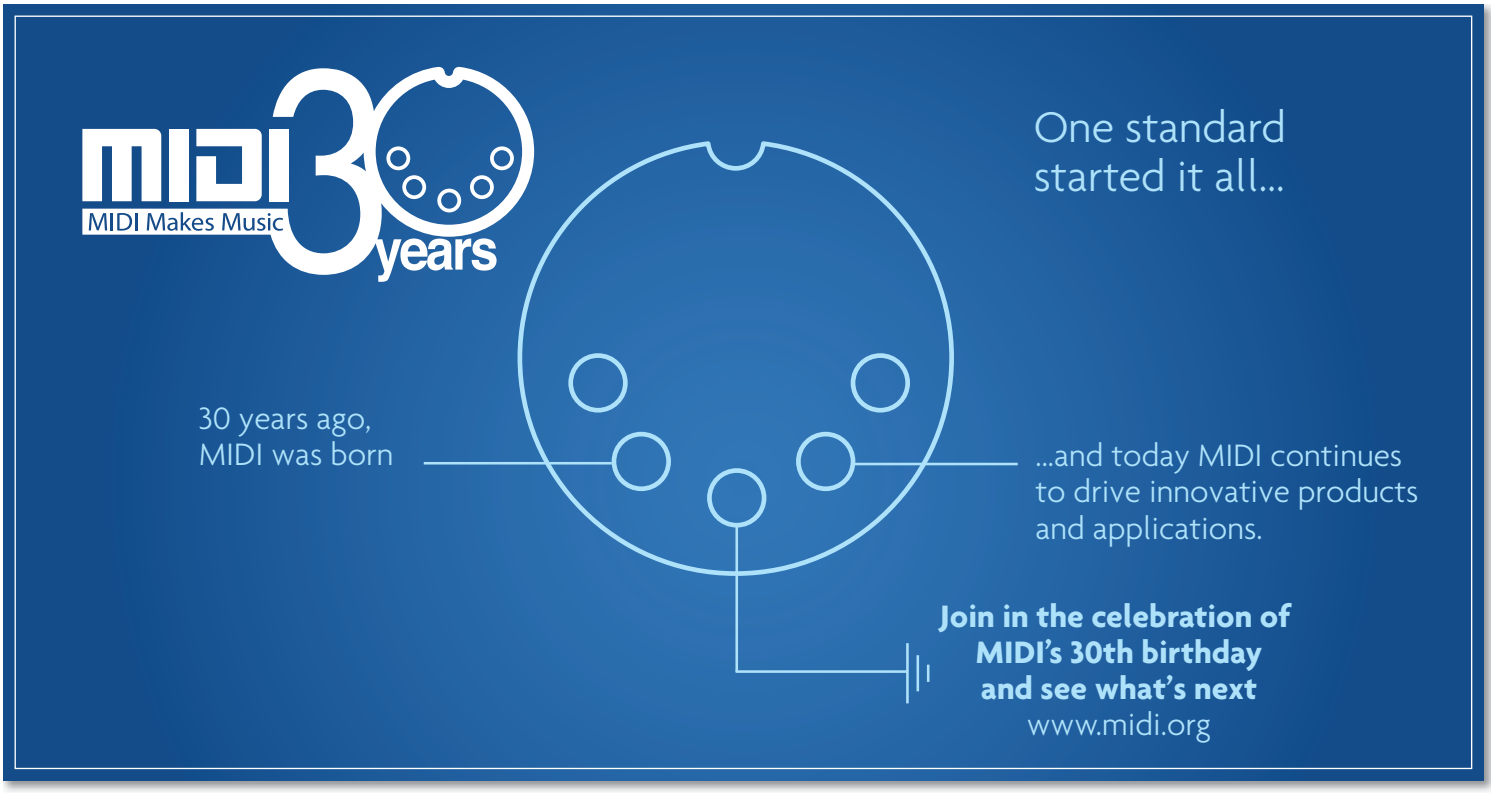

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SAMPLE LOGIC

Cinematic Guitars 2

BY JOHN KROGH

SAMPLE LOGIC'S CINEMATIC GUITARS 2 PICKS UP WHERE THE ORIGINAL LEFT off by further exploring the sonic landscape that's possible through combining creatively sampled acoustic and electric guitars with all manner of sound sculpting controls available within Native Instruments' Kontakt 5 soft sampler. As with the first library, Cinematic Guitars 2 (CG2 from here on) is squarely aimed at composers for media, although there's certainly enough musical variety to find favor among rock, industrial, and electronica producers. But is this sequel as good as the original?

Six Strings and Beyond

CG2 is divided into single instrument patches and multis that combine two or more instrument patches on the same MIDI channel. The instruments are arranged into three categories: Atmospheres, Instrumentals, and Percussives. Folders within each category further organize the patches by musical application, such as "loops," "pads," "ambience," "stingers," and so on. This sensible organization scheme is intuitive and makes it relatively easy to work with CG2's massive sample set, which weighs in at over 17GB. I also appreciate how many of the instruments' names reference film and video game soundtracks. For example, instruments such as "Gladiators in the Mist" and "Valleys of Mars" conjure scenes and sonic textures that imply how these sounds might be used.

CG2 is not your typical "guitar sample library." While you will find a solid-yet-modest selection of more conventional riffs and melodic loops played

on acoustic and electric guitars, the bulk of CG2 borders on the edge of music and sound design, which is a good thing. Even the multisampled guitar patches have an experimental quality that pushes them into fresh territory—and frankly, do we really need another "purist" guitar library?

Much of the raw sampled material has been processed and manipulated to create sounds that bear little resemblance to the original sources. For example, I found dozens of evocative pads and textures that I'd be hard pressed to identify as anything close to a guitar. I should also point out that CG2 isn't limited strictly to guitar. Other plectrum instruments were used, as is evidenced by some of the sample names. It's all wonderfully creative material that's made even more musically useful thanks to a feature-packed user interface that offers a wealth of programming options (more on this below).

As with the instrument patches, the multis are organized into helpful categories: Construction Beds, Instrument Stacks, and One Note Glory. Construction Beds feature instruments mapped across different areas of the keyboard, allowing you to build a "bed" by playing in different registers, while Instrument Stacks employ combinations of stacked instruments to make composite patches such as pads and leads. As the name implies, "One Note Glory" multis are intended to be played by holding down a single note—these are the "instant cue starters" that typically comprise layered melodic and rhythmic loops. On the whole, CG2's multis are truly inspirational and are *the* place to start when you're on a tight writing deadline.

Programming Options

Functionally, the user interface is nearly identical to that of Synergy X (reviewed July '12), so refer to that review online for details. Briefly, there are dedicated sections for EQ, dynamics, reverb, delay, lo-fi, distortion, and other effects, as well as the arpeggiator. Parameters for each section can be modulated via a step sequencer or LFO, and indeed, many of the factory patches show off the rhythmic modulation capabilities of CG2 (think Steve Jablonsky's *Transformers* soundtrack). Additionally, instruments based around looped audio samples feature a step editor for adjusting volume, pitch, pan, and filter cutoff settings for each slice within a loop. In short, there's a lot of rhythmic variety that you can bring to the sounds.

That said, there's only so much you can do with turning effects on and off and step-modulating effect parameters. Many times during the review I wished I could get deeper inside a sound, the way I've become accustomed to working with "sample oscillators" in Spectrasonics Omnisphere, Camel Audio Alchemy, or Native Instruments Reaktor. In other words, I think Sample Logic has hit the ceiling on what's possible within the context of Kontakt. After all, it's a sample player (albeit a very full-featured one) and it doesn't offer the kind of sample-level synthesis options that would take CG2 to a whole new level. Ah, but a synthesist can dream, right?

Fig. 1. These pads trigger effects chain treatments, letting you "play" the effects and get radical sonic changes within one patch. Of course, you can map them to physical pads or keys.

Trigger and Multi Madness

CG2 boasts two new interface options: Triggers and Multi Script Macros. Triggers let you momentarily engage one of 48 different effects chains from one of six trigger buttons (see **Figure 1**). This is cool for live performance or working with sounds in an improvisational way. Hit the onscreen pads (or their MIDI note equivalents from your keyboard) and you can instantly change the character of a sound. It's not possible to create your own custom effects chains, however.

Multi Script Macros let you control multiple instrument parameters from a single knob, hence the term "macro." It functions similarly to the macro function in Ableton Live, letting you create complex parameter sweeps from a single knob. A multi can have up to six macro knobs, all of which are freely assignable to instrument parameters. Nice.

Conclusions

CG2 is certainly a must-have for any media composer and offers the kind of fresh, up-to-the-second, evocative, and adrenalin-pumping textures that producers of any kind of contemporary pop music could put to use in their tracks immediately. The programmability is top notch, as is the sample content. I can't wait to hear what Sample Logic does next.

Snap Judgment

PROS Impressive sound-shaping controls available from the custom user interface make it possible to dial up seemingly endless variations. Imaginative and inspiring sample content.

CONS Much of the sequenced and rhythmic material is just one or two bars—longer patterns would help minimize repetitiveness. Documentation of features could be better.

Bottom Line

Guitars never sounded this weird, scary, aggressive, and beautiful.

$399.99
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SOUNDCLOUD

- Original audio examples.
- Read our review of Sample Logic Synergy X.

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Keyboard K KEYBUY AWARD

XFER RECORDS Cthulhu

BY FRANCIS PRÈVE

STEVE DUDA'S PLUG-INS ARE SOME OF THE BIGGEST SECRET WEAPONS IN modern dance music production. His LFO Tool—which was originally designed for Deadmau5 as a software-based control voltage generator—has morphed into one of the coolest resources for ultra-detailed sidechain effects. His drum machine, Nerve, has found its way into countless tracks thanks to its unorthodox yet intuitive approach to designing grooves. Last winter, he unleashed his latest software gadget upon the electronic and dance music communities. Cthulhu looks to do for harmony what synthesizers have done for sound itself, and we think it has applications reaching far beyond "EDM."

Snap Judgment

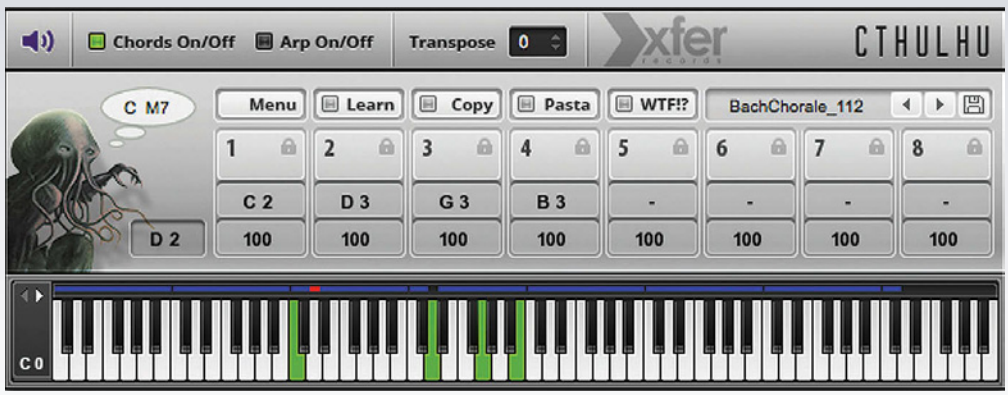
PROS Massive collection of classical (and thus royalty-free) chord progressions to draw from for inspiration. Complex and deep arpeggiator. Works beautifully with Ableton Live.

CONS Fiddly, but not impossible, to integrate with Logic. No Pro Tools version, and not compatible with the FXpansion wrapper.

What Is It?

On the surface, Cthulhu is a plug-in MIDI device (AU on Mac and VST on Windows) that puts hundreds of classical music themes and chord progressions at your fingertips. You can audition a cornucopia of chords by playing single notes, coming up with progressions that you might never have imagined otherwise. In Duda's words, "Cthulhu can provide great inspiration to even the theory masters, preventing us keyboardists from falling into familiar 'motor-memory' chords and instead helping us navigate through time-tested progressions with physical ease."

Some critics have used the dreaded word "cheating" in reference to Cthulhu, but that's missing the point because once upon a time, drum machines, sequencers, quantization, and even synthesizers themselves were considered cheating. That's obviously no longer the case. Right? [Keyboard *is in favor of any technology that invites people to discover and play music. Cheating is when someone uses that technology as a shortcut to a prize like money or fame and doesn't actually care about getting skilled. In other words, we love Cthulhu as long as you love craft. —Ed.]*



Chord Mode

Cthulhu works in two basic modes: Chord and Arpeggiator. In chord mode, you can select from a few hundred presets that contain classical progressions from Bach's legendary chorales, along with Beethoven, Liszt, Mozart, Debussy, and many other composers. Load in a preset and each MIDI key becomes a different chord from a given piece by the selected composer, some with extremely wide, open voicings; others with more clustered notes.

From there, you simply play individual notes from across the keyboard range and decide which of the resulting chords you like. Since there are countless permutations within a single preset, you can operate without preconceptions, creating chord progressions that you most likely wouldn't have composed yourself. After all, every keyboardist has keys, modes, licks, and voicings that they fall back on when first approaching their instrument. Cthulhu bypasses those habits and preconceptions, letting you choose harmonic progression based on what sounds inspiring in the moment.

Even if you stick exclusively with the onboard presets, Cthulhu really does feel like magic. And in some ways, yes, like "cheating." But if you dig a bit deeper, you can also create your own presets by simply turning on Cthulhu's Learn mode and assigning your own favorite chords to each of the keys, then saving the results. Of course, you don't need to play the chords in the same order as the original composer put them—you can rearrange and deconstruct at will. If you already have some training in music theory, Cthulhu isn't going to replace it—it's going to enhance it.

While Cthulhu works with a fairly wide range of sequencers including Logic (albeit with a lot of bizarro IAC fiddling in Logic's case), it's especially easy to integrate into Ableton Live. This brings us to another interesting application of the plug-in. By using Live 9's new "Convert Harmony to MIDI" feature, you can extract chord progressions from *any* audio file, then use Cthulhu's advanced Learn features to convert the resulting MIDI file into yet more presets based on the songs you dig. This makes for a powerful tool for remixers.

Arpeggiator Mode

The chord tools alone are worth the price of admission, but Duda doesn't stop there. There's also an extremely powerful arpeggiator, waiting to take those clever chord progressions and make them bubble and percolate. Naturally, Cthulhu's arpeggiator includes all the usual up-down modes, with a few intelligent variations similar to the options in Ableton Live's arpeggiator tools. But that's where the similarities end, since Cthulhu's arpeggiator folds in an array of amenities normally found in step sequencers, but in a unique manner.

For starters, once you've selected an arpeggiator mode, each step can be specified as a graph type (that is, you can switch between the various up-down modes on a per-step basis) or numerically, by selecting specific notes in the chord being arpeggiated. While this may sound complicated at first, it's remarkably intuitive in practice.

From there, you can add randomization on specific steps, which is great for giving your sequences an improvised feel—again, generating patterns that you might not come up with on your own. What's more, if you've got Cthulhu set up to send data to a different MIDI track, you can record that data on the fly, letting Cthulhu happily chug along while you sip coffee and wait for a nifty riff to appear. Afterward, you can sift through the MIDI recording and pick your favorite bits for further editing.

Because of all of these features, combined with the way they're implemented, Cthulhu is also poised to be a powerful tool for *teaching* music theory. Why? Because whenever you play a chord or arpeggio, a clever little graphic of Cthulhu himself tells you what chord you're playing via a thought bubble. So if you want to crack a book or take a music class, Cthulhu can actually help you understand why you like the progressions and melodic motifs you do.

Conclusions

Some are saying that Cthulhu could be a transformative product, infusing new levels of sophistication to electronic dance music in the coming years. Punditry aside, for 39 bucks, Cthulhu is going to help a lot of musicians of all types overcome their ingrained approaches to performance and composition. To some, that kind of breakthrough is priceless. To us, it certainly merits a Key Buy. ♫

Bottom Line

Fantastic resource for generating innovative chord progressions and arpeggios.

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SOUNDCLOUD

Audio examples of Cthulhu's chord progression presets.

keyboardmag.com/may2013

BEEPSTREET Sunrizer

BY FRANCIS PRÈVE

WHILE BEEPSTREET'S SUNRIZER HAS BEEN AVAILABLE FOR A WHILE NOW, THE latest round of updates has really brought it into its own as a powerful iPad synth for both studio and gigging. Overall, the look and feel of the app has remained consistent, with an interface that strongly evokes Roland's JP-8000 virtual analog synth.

The JP-8000 comparison doesn't stop with the looks. Sunrizer's oscillators deliver an exceptional recreation of the 8000's genre-defining "super saw" waveform, which emulates the sound of multiple stacked and detuned sawtooth waveforms for massive pad and lead sounds—perfect for the current festival sound that's all the rage.

While the rest of Sunrizer's oscillator waveform options are pretty much what you'd expect, its real strength lies in its extensive filtering options. For starters, there are two filters in its signal path, which can be switched between series and parallel modes for added flexibility. From there, things get pretty deep rather quickly. In addition to the standard lowpass, highpass, bandpass, and notch types, there are comb, formant, and allpass options, as well as ultra-beefy "Power" and waveshaper modes that really give this synth an extra shot of testosterone.

Modulation options are relatively straightforward, with dual ADSR envelopes hardwired to the amp and filter. Sunrizer's two LFOs are also quite thoughtfully designed, with one-shot and trigger modes that allow them to double as additional envelope tools. Best of all, these synth parameters—including the oscillators and filters—all fit on a single screen without feeling cramped, even for those with thicker fingers.

The two other pages in Sunrizer's interface are devoted to its extensive effects section and deep arpeggiator functions. The effects section is set up in three stages, arranged serially. The first stage offers distortion, chorus, EQ, or phaser modes. The second stage is a basic stereo delay with cross-feed and sync options. The final stage is a hall reverb, with six knobs for customizing its sound. Overall, these effects are well implemented and do a lot to give Sunrizer's presets an extremely polished sound.

The programmable arpeggiator is so complex that it includes 27 presets that really show off its capabilities, which is a good thing, because it's not particularly intuitive. Even so, these presets are great starting points for your own explorations—and some of them are quite inspirational, so much so that I immediately started having track ideas while fiddling around on the keyboard.

All in all, Sunrizer is a great little iPad synth that's well designed, easy to navigate, and sounds wonderfully lush—especially if you're looking for progressive and trance textures. ♫

Snap Judgment

PROS Extremely flexible filters. Excellent recreation of the Roland super saw waveform. Very easy to navigate. Lush effects.

CONS The arpeggiator's complexity could be a bit much for beginners.

Bottom Line

Trance and progressive producers will love this intelligent little synth.

$6.99

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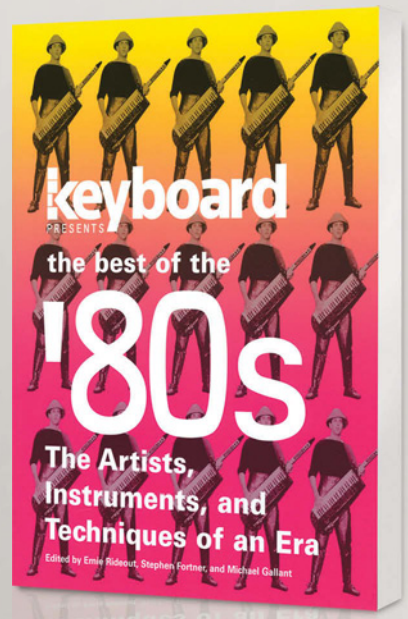

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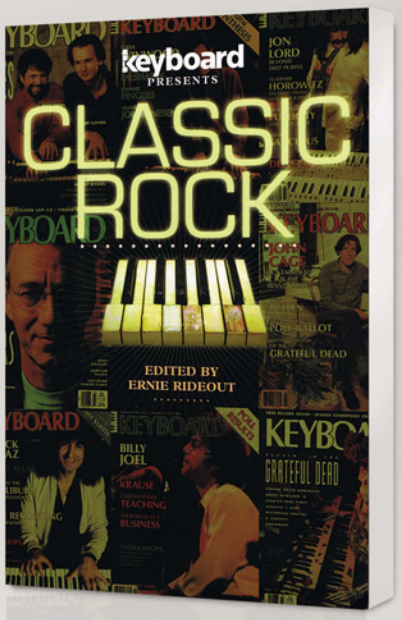

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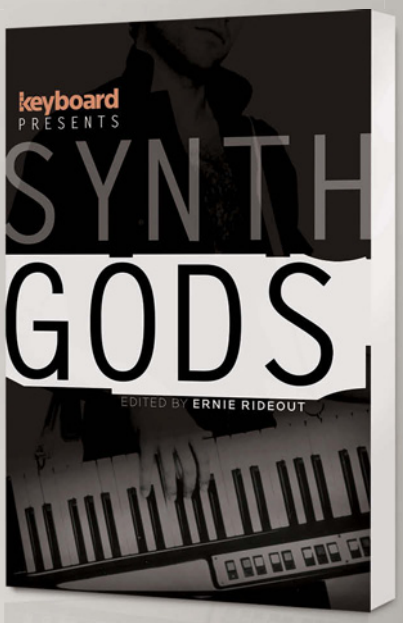

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Culled from the pages of *Keyboard* magazine, this book spotlights artists who did much more than just play synthesizers: they changed the course of music history and inspired generations. Featuring in-depth profiles of Jan Hammer, Wendy Carlos, Rick Wakeman, Brian Eno, and others, this book delves into how these new, untested boxes of circuitry captured the imagination of so many legendary artists.

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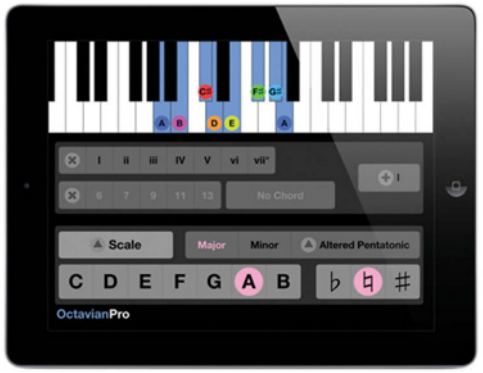

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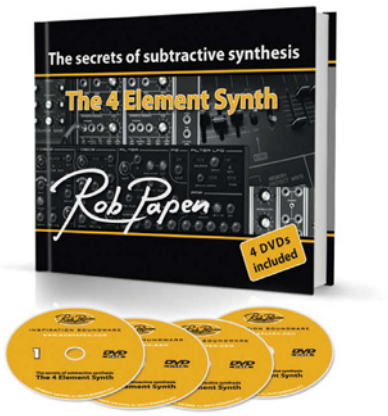

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5 THINGS I'VE LEARNED ABOUT Taking Musical Chances

BY GREG WELLS

ANTHONY GORDON

TO THIS DAY, I STILL GET EXCITED ABOUT CHASING REALLY INTERESTING MUSIC. I don't care that much about the music business, or making a lot of money. I really feel that if you follow what you find creatively compelling, exciting, and slightly mysterious, the other external kinds of things will eventually come. Here are some things I've learned about taking musical chances that I hope will encourage you to take some of your own.

Los Angeles-based producer, songwriter, and multi-instrumentalist **Greg Wells** has worked with acclaimed artists including Adele, Katy Perry, OneRepublic, Mika, and Jamie Cullum. Find out more at gregwells.net.

1. The Power of Belief

I spent three years on the road playing a multitude of musical instruments with K.D. Lang in the early 1990s. K.D. encouraged me to write songs and get involved in record production, pushing me in a braver direction than just taking session or touring gigs. Having her believe in me gave me the strength to believe in myself. So I'm a huge advocate for the power of *belief*. If you believe you can do something, you're right. And if you believe you can't, well, you're right about that, too.

2. Change Instruments

Sometimes changing instruments can take a song in an entirely new direction. The piano, for example, can be a very heavy flavor and can easily make everything sound like an Elton John track. If a piano part isn't working for you, try substituting it with another keyboard instrument such as synth or organ. Getting out of your comfort zone can have surprising sonic results.

3. Be Objective

I'm constantly humbled and inspired by listening to other mix engineers' work when I'm mixing my own records. The same thing can be said of songwriting. If I'm writing a song and I feel a lyric is boring or not working, I'll often tell myself, "You can beat that." Always listen to your own music from the perspective of an *outsider*, looking for places where it can be improved.

4. Viva la Vocal!

If you have a singer on your recording, the vocal immediately becomes the most important instrument in the entire track. I'm a huge advocate of getting the best vocal sound possible. That doesn't mean you need to buy a $12,000 microphone, but you can rent one for $100 a day. I also always try to get a scratch vocal recorded to a click track with piano or guitar as early as possible. That way I can always hear the melodic and harmonic structure of the song.

5. Embrace the Lo-Fi Zone

Piano and drums are traditionally miked with expensive, pristine-sounding condenser mics. But some of the best sounds for these instruments are often created with the help of inexpensive gear. One of my favorite miking techniques is to use a monaural room mic about seven feet from the piano or drums. I also use a cheap mic that makes everything sound like an old radio. Blending hi-fi and lo-fi versions of the same instrument can impart personality to a mix.

Greg gives more sage advice in a video master class at Humber College in Toronto.

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